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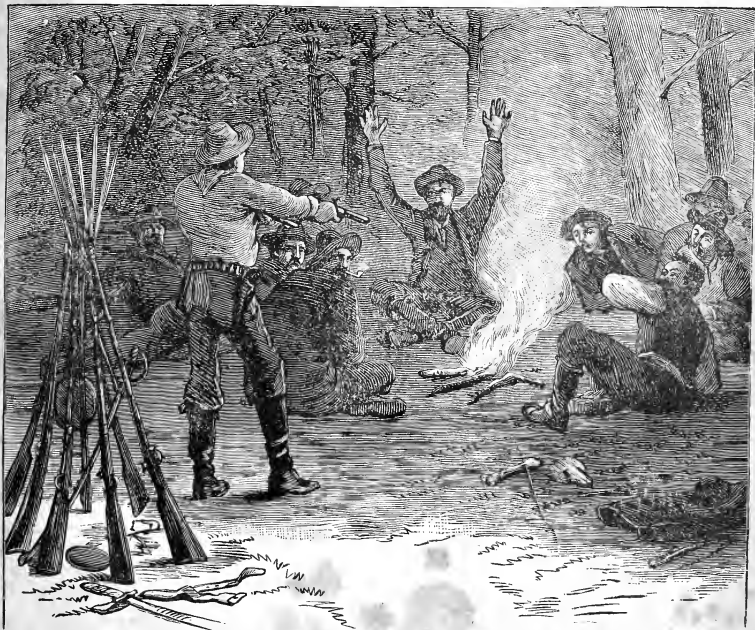
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NO. 240.

ON SHILOH'S FIELD; or, Fighting Kit of Kentucky.

By WARD EDWARDS, "High Private," U. S. V.

A Story of Battlefield and Bivouac.



How Kit became master of the rebel camp.

On Shiloh's Field;

OR,—

Fighting Kit of Kentucky.

A Story of Battlefield and Bivouac.

BY WARD EDWARDS, "HIGH PRIVATE," U. S. V.

Author of "Blue or Gray," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

A SAD PARTING.

Crack—crack!

A double rifle report broke the stillness of

the night air.

"My soul, what is that?"

The shivering toned exclamation fell from the lips of a gray-haired man, whose mild, smooth shaven face and garb proclaimed him to be a minister.

He had sprung to his feet, as had all the other members of his family, and while every face blanched every head was bent in a listening attitude.

From a point not far off came a wild shout, uttered by a number of men at one time, and intoned with vindictiveness and hatred.

Crack—crack!

Two more shots rang out, clear, sharp, with deadly emphasis.

"What does it mean?"

Again the speaker was the gray haired

man of the gospel.

"Charles—Charles—it may be—a dread presentiment tells me it is—our darling first-born who is returning."

Once more a wild shout reached their ears. At first it was exultant, then it changed to the fierce tones that bespeak disappointment.

One minute of breathless suspense and then the tread of swiftly falling feet could be heard.

"It is Kit," gasped Mr. Langdon.

Bang—bang!

Somebody was pounding on the door.

For one instant all were spellbound, and then Ben Langdon leaped to the door.

He heard the bullets crash into the wood. But he did not hesitate.

"Hurry!"

He recognized the voice.

It was that of his brother Kit, thick and husky and filled with pain, indicating possibly that he had been wounded.

"Courage, Kit," Ben gave reply, and a second or two later shot back the last bolt and flung open the door.

Kit Langdon staggered across the threshold, his face ghastly white and convulsed with pain.

Ben let him pass and then barred the door with his figure and faced the mad rabble that rushed up the gravelled walk leading from the road to the door of the little parsonage.

"Let us at him! Bring out the Union spy! Kill the traitor!"

They would have thrust Ben aside, but he caught up the first man in his arms and violently hurled him against those immediately in his rear, sending half a dozen sprawling to the earth.

"Down with all opposition!"

"Kill the huller!"

"Wipe out all the cursed viper's brood!"

"The South forever!"

"All shoot together!"

As this last wild and savage cry rang out fully a dozen rifles were raised and aimed at Ben Langdon's breast.

But he never quailed.

"Pause ere it be too late!" he cried in ringing voice. "Do you know me? Does any one present know me?"

"Yes, you're Ben Langdon," shouted some one.

"Has any taint of treason ever attached to my name?"

"No; you're of the right stuff. But not so with the fellow who got away from us and has just gone into the house."

Do any of you know anything of my actions in time of war?"

"We've heard tell, Ben," croaked an elderly man, "ay, lad, we've heard tell of the glorious work ye've done along with Morgan."

Ben said as how ye'd been recognized a hero and complemented you afore all the men."

"It is true."

"I'm glad to hear it. They do say that you fit like a lion. And report says as how you'll hall of Morgan's cavalry had a boot gobbled up if yer hadn't done jest as you did."

"Now, then, is there a man here who doubts my loyalty to the South?"

"Not one," was the unanimous reply.

"Does any one here believe that I am a coward?"

"Not one."

"Does any one here believe that I am a liar—that I will chew any words I once utter?"

"Not one."

"Then listen to me: That man whom you have been pursuing is my brother. His sentiments are Union, but he is as honest in his convictions as I am. He is not a spy—he is not a Union soldier even—and I intend to defend him until the last gasp. He is in the house there—am I in this door. To reach him you will have to go through this door, and you can do it only over my dead body."

He spoke firmly and presented an undaunted front to the wild rabble.

A silence followed—a silence so profound that brave Ben could hear the beating of his heart.

The would-be slayers of Kit Langdon were in a quandary.

"I say, Ben," at last said one, "I don't think you're doing the fair thing."

"Why not?"

"Cause we want Kit, and we don't want to harm him."

"You know my determination."

He saw that to say much would be a mere waste of words.

After a little the guerrillas—for such they were—retired a short distance.

What passed between them they made known through a person selected as a speaker.

"Mr. Langdon," he said, as he advanced to within a few feet of the door, "we've all heard of what you've done, and it ain't in our hearts to do yer harm. But I s'pose yer know as how Kit made a speech some time ago, saying every body to go into the Union army. Well, even though he ain't never carried arms, he's as much a traitor, as though he had."

"And your decision?"

"It is that while he's under that roof we won't try to touch him. But we holds to the opinion that he's our mutton jest as soon as he sticks his head outside."

"We will not permit him to peacefully leave the neighborhood?"

"He had no business to come back after he'd once got away safely."

"You will not spare him for my sake?"

"No."

"Nor for the sake of that gray-haired man—our father, God bless him!—who has preached eternal life to you for so many years?"

"No. 'Cause why? 'Cause the parson's gone back to us as well? He's Union, too. No—no, Ben, of the hull family you're the only one who's true blue."

Kit held out his hand. Ben, seeing that nothing more was to be gained—that the man would not promise any greater leniency toward his elder brother.

As the speaker retreated, Ben closed and bolted the door, and with a serious face joined the group in the cozy sitting-room of the parsonage.

He found Kit resting heavily in the large armchair, and that was generally held sacred to the use of the revered father.

"Are you hurt, Kit?" Did any of their rasaily bullets hit you?" he tenderly inquired as he approached.

Kit held out his hand.

"I heard all, Ben," he said, a grateful look in his face. "It was noble of you to face those brutes in my behalf."

"I didn't say no more—you army brother—and we have always loved each other dearly. Are you hurt much—for hurt you must be?"

"I do not believe it amounts to much—a mere scratch. But now I must go. I cannot consent to remain here longer, knowing that my presence means possible peril to these dear ones."

"No, no," said Ben, firmly. Sit still; do not attempt to rise. Now tell us what has happened?"

"Nothing so very much," returned Kit. "You know I was home soon after Sumter was fired on. The war was running high, and I made a little address upholding the Union. Then I went back to Chicago, and went to work in my old position."

"I course I anxiously watched the drift of events. A newspaper account of the state of feeling in this vicinity alarmed me, especially as father's name was mentioned. He had made several remarks in favor of the Union. It seemed, however, that the feeling against him was said to be bitter."

"At once I became alarmed for his safety,

and determined to return here and assist them to reach a place of safety in the North, possibly in Chicago."

"I knew I was hated, and so came secretly, hoping to reach here undetected. But fate was against me. I was halted a mile from here by a sentinel stationed in the road. He recognized me. I shot past him, and then the fearful race began, which ended as you know."

"My brave boy!" murmured Mr. Langdon.

"You thought of your mother, then," said Mrs. Langdon, with tears in her eyes.

And I returned home on the same mission as that of Ben. I was in the room of excitement, immediately applied for leave of absence, and arrived here this afternoon."

Kit's wound proved to be a mere scratch, as he had said, and when it had been examined, washed and dressed by Ben, all the family gathered in the sitting-room.

What was to be done?

That was the question which occupied their minds.

It was midnight; and any number of plans had been discussed, ere they settled on one that seemed to possess the elements of success.

"That's the only course, father," said Ben. "You must seek refuge for the present in the mountains."

"I don't like to flee—to desert my charge and church," was the reply, a troubled expression on the mild face. "I would become a martyr to principle if necessary."

"It is for mother's sake and that of Belle," was the rejoinder.

"For their sake then, I consent," he sadly said. "But how about Kit?"

"I have hit on a plan. He must blacken his face and hands and pass as one of the negroes."

"It is repugnant to my every feeling," cried Kit.

"You must do it," said Ben, earnestly, in his brother's ear. "It would kill mother to have you shot before her eyes."

By two o'clock they were ready to start.

In an hour the moon would rise; by that time they would—if successful—be at the foot of the mountain. And the luminary of the night would render them invaluable assistance.

"If only the guerrillas have withdrawn," he slowly muttered. Ben, who had remained to do save to open the door and issue forth.

It was the back door at which they were to make their exit.

Opened, while all held their breath, no sound of an alarming nature was heard, and silently they stole out into the darkness.

Still nothing was heard to alarm them. They must believe that Kit will not make any attempt to leave the house to-night, and are not as watchful as they might be," thought Ben.

His surmise was the correct one.

In safety they passed the limits of the parsonage grounds, and the highway lay before them.

They did not venture along this, taking a cut across the fields instead.

Just as the moon showed her rim above the horizon, and when they were half a mile from the mountain foot, they were ordered to halt.

"Are you?" was demanded.

"I am Ben Langdon, of Morgan's cavalry," was the reply of that individual as he stepped to the front.

"Is that truth?"

"I must have a look at you anyhow," was the rejoinder. "I've heard as how all the rest of the family are Union."

A lantern was soon flashed into his face. As it was the moon he did not wish to stoop to stoop if it could be avoided.

It was an anxious few minutes that passed, during which the lantern was flashed into the face of each one of the party.

Kit's eyes had been recognized as the first. Every one breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"Are you satisfied?" asked Ben.

"Perfectly."

"You may as well move on."

"Where are you going?"

"Into the mountains."

"What for?"
 "To place my parents in a place of safety."
 "Ain't they safe to him?"
 "No, not in such troublous times as these. Good-night."
 "Good-night. But, I say?"
 "Well, what is it?"
 "You don't intend to stay there yourself?"

"No! I shall soon be where I belong when any fighting is to be done—at the front!"

When the foot of the mountains was reached a halt was made.

"I must leave you here," Kit said. "If I go into the mountains with you it would be impossible to say when I could get away. If I make quick work of it I may be able to reach the other side in a day's safety."
 "Can you not stay with us?" asked Mr. Langdon.

"No; duty calls me North. After to-night's experience—after being hunted like a wild beast—only one course is left me, which is to subdue a cause which can breed such hell-bound as those who sought my blood."

"Kit?"

It was Ben who spoke, and a world of gentle reproach was conveyed in that one word. "I can't help it, Ben."

"In justice, Kit, you should not condemn the whole cause on account of the actions of a few individuals."

"Oh, Ben," and Kit's voice rung with pathos, "it is not possible that you believe the cause of the South is just?"

"If I did not, I would not be fighting for it," was the proud reply.

"I would not believe you act on conviction."

"Even as yourself," returned Ben. "You will join the Union army?"

"I shall."

"May God watch over you—and if perchance we should meet in the heat of battle—"

He faltered, his voice trembled, he could say no more.

"Heaven grant that no bullet of mine ever harms you, Ben!" solemnly said Kit.

"The thought is dreadful!"

"And to me also. But, duty is duty, Kit, and I will not shrink it. Duty calls to me in one direction while it calls me in another, but it can never sever us."

"No, never," said Kit, in a husky voice.

"You will first see our loved ones safe in a place of refuge in the mountains?"

"I will."

Somehow, for a brief spell, those two strong men became children again; and, holding each other in close embrace, their bearded lips met as tenderly as those of lovers.

Then they drew apart.

Kit now bade his parents and sister a farewell—perhaps the last he should ever utter if it occurred to him; and then, turning on his heel, hurried away.

"There goes a noble man," thought Ben, as he watched his brother's form recede.

"Ah! if he could only think as I do."

"Brave, high-spirited Ben!" murmured Kit, as he went swiftly forward. "It wrings my heart to leave him fighting against the Union—but he is honest in his convictions, and I must not blame him."

Surely no father had two nobler sons than that awful strife than had Mr. Langdon.

But it was terrible to remember that they were opposed to each other, that either might shed the other's blood, that either might in low and cold in a head that had been pillowed on the same mother's breast, and stiffen limbs that had been bent in prayer at the same dear mother's knees!

CHAPTER II.

A PERILOUS MISSION.

The spring of 1862 was a period of gloom in all the Northern states.

It had been said:

"The ninety days the rebellion will be at an end, and the rebels conquered."

But this had not proved true.

The Southerners had shown that they knew how to fight—and fight well.

They also made it perfectly evident that their officers were not less brilliant and less able than those of the Federal army.

Therefore, there were not a few people, who could look facts squarely in the face, who said that the Southern generals were more than a match for those of our own armies.

Certainly it is, that with smaller armies, with

their men lacking in discipline, the Confederates had given us (not to be misquoted) as to the form of expressing the facts several good drubbings.

The Federal troops had begun to look with respect on the men opposed to them.

"Something must be done."

This was the desperate feeling and resolution at the North.

The eyes of the country were turned toward the west where General Bragg, the Confederate commander, had everything his own way.

The Union generals decided that Fort Donelson should be taken, and preparations to that end were quickly made.

Scouting parties were sent out in all directions, and one of them was under the charge of Kit Langdon. For he was more frequently spoken of, Kit from Kentucky.

It was an extremely dangerous mission which had been given him to accomplish; and, indeed, he had been selected because it was an extremely dangerous expedition.

Already Kit had made a name for himself, had established a reputation as a brave man, and he had been urged to accept an officer's position.

But he had resolutely shaken his head.

"I do not care to become an officer," he said; "and I shall never become one unless there is a need for officers that cannot be filled. Then if my country calls on me, I will not shrink."

He was a very useful man as a private, since he could be detached and sent away without causing any comment, and his lion-like courage and indomitable will insured success in everything he undertook.

And so, just before the affair at Fort Donelson, he was detached, and bidden to hold himself in readiness for dash across country.

He was permitted to select his own men. A score were offered him, but he thought a smaller number would be safer, so he took only three.

"What I want," said the brigade commander, "is to obtain a more accurate idea of the ground on which we are to fight."

And particularly do I wish to learn about a ravine, about which the reports differ. I want to know all about that ravine."

"I am afraid, sir, that being mounted is a bad thing if we are going to explore the ravine," said Kit. "Perhaps the expedition had better be made afoot."

The other shook his head.

"No, it would take too long," he said. "I will leave it to you how to manage the matter. You can leave your horses, if necessary, and go back to them after you've been through the ravine."

"Thus it was settled."

It was the most important trust that had been placed in Kit's hands, and in his feeling of personal pride all thought of danger was forgotten.

At last the camp was left behind.

As yet none of his companions knew where they were going, or what for.

Now one of them asked:

"What's the orders, Kit?"

"To go into Fort Donelson and count the Confederates there," was the reply, with a merry twinkle in his eyes.

He who asked the question turned pale and gasped for breath.

The others flinched uneasily in their saddles.

"You don't mean it, Kit, do you?"

A ringing laugh that fell from Kit's lips was the answer.

They saw that he had been fooling, but felt too much relieved to get angry about it.

"I didn't know but what it was so," said one, "cause we took off the regulation clothes and put on civil suits again."

"No, we're going on a simple scouting expedition. But as we may get pretty close to the enemy, or actually encounter him, it is safer to dress in this way."

"Then some of us may never get back?"

"It is possible," although I hope that we may all get through safe and sound."

As a matter of fact they were engaged in an extremely perilous undertaking.

Across country they struck, in high spirits, even though they knew that soon a rebel bullet might lay them low in death.

Fortune smiled on them.

They were going to the nearest limit to which Kit's orders directed him, and although he had encountered a score of people in it, they had not been halted.

Now Kit faced about.

His aim was now to return to camp, examining the ravine on his way.

A brisk ride of an hour brought them to one end of the ravine.

During this ride Kit had decided on a course to pursue.

Leaving one man with the horses, with orders to advance and meet him at the upper end of the ravine, Kit took the others and plunged into the thick growth of young timber.

Forward they carefully went, Kit noting distances as accurately as possible without actually measuring them.

"This is a bad sort of a hole," remarked one of the men, when a momentary pause was made while Kit took some notes.

"It is that."

"I tell you it'd fare had with a regiment that got mixed up in here."

"So it would. And do you know I think it mighty queer we ain't run agin a nest of rebels in here after this?"

"It is queer to me also. Wonder if Kit's thought of it?"

"What's that?"

Kit had heard his name mentioned and asked the question.

"This ravine strikes us as bein' a likely place to run across a party of rebels."

"So it is," said Kit, slowly.

"You'd a thought it, the hole?"

"Yes; and I meant to tell you to keep your eyes open and your weapons handy in case they were needed. But I didn't say anything thinking it might be alarming you without any reason."

"Why, Kit, you ain't agoin' now to begin to look at these fellows?"

"Not at all—for I know that you are not," was the firm reply.

After this colloquy they moved forward more carefully than before.

Each man had his ears and eyes wide open. When they reached the end of the ravine was not far distant, all drew a deep breath of relief.

They thought that now all danger was past.

Yet they had never before, since entering the ravine, been anywhere near as great peril as they were now in, for, as was natural, they dropped a portion of their caution—even while advancing and close upon a concealed enemy.

Forward they went, intending to emerge not more than a quarter of a mile distant.

Half this distance had been traversed in safety, without an intimation of danger.

Then, suddenly, they were surprised by a stern command:

"Halt!"

The order was accompanied by the ominous clicking of a musket-lock.

Taken completely by surprise, all three were speechless for a minute.

Then dropped from the lips of one the single expression:

"Bagged!"

It was uttered in a tone too low for the ears of any save his companions.

"Hush!" hissed Kit.

"Do you surrender?"

"Surrender?"

Kit repeated the word, in a tone that was filled with questioning surprise.

"Yes, surrender."

"What should we surrender for? And to whom?"

"Surrender, because you are enemies."

"And to whom, did you say? If you mentioned the fact I failed to catch the words."

"Why, you Secesh devils, can't you see that we're Yanks?"

"Yanks," gasped Kit.

He saw through the name the other was trying to work, and there was a twinkle in his eyes that spoke volumes.

"Yanks, did you say?"

"Yes."

"Well, my lads," he said, to his companions, in a low tone, yet, intended to reach the ears of the other party, "keep your pistols handy in case there ain't too many of the cussed Yanks, just pile in when I give the sign, and let 'em see what three Texas fire-eaters can do."

The words were not without effect. A party of half a score of Confederate guerrillas were scattered in the bushes, cutting off retreat at every point.

There was no mistaking the grit in Kit's tone. It had the genuine ring when I give the spokesman of the party, having started out to fool Kit, was fooled himself.

"You're Secesh, then?" he said.

"If you are a Yank, then I'm a Secesh!" was the positive reply, to which more than one meaning could be attached.

"Guess so, all straight."

"Guess so, too," said Kit, "that is for you."

You've got us in a fix, if it is to judge by all these buzzards sticking out here and there."

The spokesman laughed.

"No—no—I mean that you haven't felt into the hands of Yanks, but into the hands of your friends—for as ten fellows, I'll warrant, are as rank Secesh as it's possible to make 'em."

Kit sighed deeply.
To all appearance it was a sigh occasioned by a feeling of relief.
"Makes you feel better, eh?"

"Slightly."
"Well, that's right. Come along, now, we've got a camp-fire a little bit up this way, and we don't mind letting you have a had at a little porker we've just been roasting."

Kit found an opportunity to say a few words to his two companions on the way to the camp-fire.

As they went along, more than one suspicious glance was cast at Kit and his companions.

The scrutiny, however, resulted in an opinion favorable to them, and they no sooner reached the camping spot than the rebels dropped all reserve and caution.

The pig was roasted to a turn.
It was luscious—so Kit decided, as soon as his eyes rested on it.

His eyes did not deceive him, as he learned a few minutes later, when he began to pick a spare-rib.

In less than fifteen minutes the meal was finished, and the rebels for the most part pulled out pipes and filled them preparatory to having a smoke.

"Who can tell a story?"

This question fell from the lips of the man who had acted as spokesman.

Like lightning, Kit saw the opportunity. He winked expressively at one of his companions, and then he turned to where the guns were standing.

Nobody volunteered to tell a story.
"Can't some of you fellows?" looking at Kit and his friends.

"Don't 'em," said Sam Black, musically. "Want something from real life?"

"Yes, so long as it's exciting."

"Well, now, let me see. I guess I might tell about the time when I was all but hung. You see—"

"Ahem!"

Every eye was turned toward Kit, who had coughed as if on purpose.

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing; only as I've heard that story about fifty times, I beg to be excused from listening to it again."

"Well, this time, as I have to laugh, and to all appearances Sam Black was much disconcerted."

Kit rose to his feet, stretched, yawned, and started slowly away.

After taking a couple of steps he paused, and faced the party with a laugh.

"I hope you'll enjoy Sam's story well enough to pay you for the trouble he'll put you to. When he gets to a certain point he'll declare he can't explain what followed until you all give him your revolvers, which I advise you to watch carefully, as he has a weakness for a fine gun."

A puzzled look shot into Sam's face.

The next instant he saw clearly the hint Kit was giving him.

But it troubled him greatly.

The story of how he came near to being hung must be concocted as he went along, and how in the world was he to ring in a circumstance on which to base a request for the use of their weapons to help make it plain?

Sam was a shrewd fellow, but for once he saw himself in a box, to escape from which would require all his wits and nerve.

However, he proved himself equal to the occasion.

From his lips there fell a rollicking laugh.
"That ain't fair, old hoss!" he called after Kit.

"What ain't fair?"

"Why to go to prejudicin' the minds of this 'ere jolly lot of fellows agin my story."

"I didn't say anything to prejudice them against it. I only said you'd give 'em a heap of trouble in asking for their weapons so's to explain something more clearly."

"That ain't no trouble if the story's a good one."

So said the spokesman.

"It is a good one," chimed in Sam's side partner, who was just beginning to comprehend the drift of the by-play.

"Supposin' we start the thing right?" suggested Sam, as he eyed Sam's hands down here in a pile like, and then I won't have to break into my story and come to a stop while I get 'em."

Not a bad idea, and with a laugh the leading rebel drew his only revolver and

laid it down in front of Sam, at the same time looking keenly at him. Perhaps he suspected Sam, and meant to give him some room to show himself. All his companions followed suit.

It was a simple trick—one which a person would think could hardly be played on ten men of ordinary intelligence.

Xet the fact remains that it was done.

"Ahem!"

This time it was Sam who coughed. He glanced toward Kit.

The latter darted at him a look which said:

"Go ahead. Keep their attention for a minute or two."

"Well, boys," began Sam, "you may think it a funny beginning to speak about Sir Isaac Newton, the man who discovered the law of gravitation through seeing an apple fall from a tree."

"Yet I must speak of him in the beginning; cause why? cause the scason I come so near bein' hung was because, while I'm a pretty smart fellow, I think I can be a blamed fool, and was then. And I mention Newton to show that a man can be a fool times, even if he's got as many brains as that chap himself."

"Well, don't be long-winded."

"What's Newton got to do with your story, anyhow?"

"Ain't to be let tell my story in my own way?" asked Sam, in an injured tone.

"Yes, as long as you don't spin it too long."

"Then I must tell what Newton did. You see, he had two cats of which he thought a heap. One of 'em was a great big fellow that 'ud a made three of 'other one, which wasn't more'n a kitten."

"And he struck him one day as how he kept the cats in the house too much on account of not wantin' to open the door when they wanted to get out. So he sent for the carpenter and had 'em to him."

"I want you to cut a hole in the door so's them cats can come in and go out just when they're so minded."

"All right, sir," says the carpenter, and soon he had a hole cut in the door big enough for the biggest cat to go through."

"Later on in the day, Newton felt the little cat rubbin' agin his leg, and looked around for the big one; but the big fellow had come out."

"Why ain't you out doors, puss?" says Newton. "Why ain't you outside with your chum?"

"Then he chanced to look toward the door and at once jumped up from his chair, madder nor a horse."

"Said that blockhead of a carpenter here! he said; and when the carpenter got there Newton just eyed him sarsentle like he did the while, and then he says:

"Look at that door!"

"Yes, sir," says the carpenter. "Well?"

"Well, don't you see how stupid you have been? Ain't I told you I wanted both my cats to be able to go out?"

"You did, sir," says the carpenter, kind of mystified like.

"Well, sir, don't you see that the little one's in here?"

"I do, sir," says the carpenter.

"Newton was thunderin' mad, now."

"Well, sir, I want the little cat to go out as well as the big one."

"Then why don't she go, sir?" says the carpenter.

"Why! You infernal blockhead can't you see why?—you cut a hole for the big one, but didn't make one for the little cat."

"That's true," says the carpenter.

"My Lord!" he said, "if the big cat can go through that hole, can't the little one, too?"

A hearty laugh burst from the throats of Sam's auditors. They could see the ludicrousness of the situation in which the great Sir Isaac Newton found himself.

"Well, but now go on with the story of how you came near being hung," said the spokesman.

"All right," said Sam, coolly; "I only wanted to show how the smartest of men can sometimes be fools—just as you have been."

They all started.

Something in his tone and words made them feel uncomfortable.

Then suspicious looks flashed into their faces, and they eyed Sam with interest.

"I demand that you all surrender peacefully."

All eyes turned in the direction of the voice uttering the words.

It was to find Kit standing between them

and their muskets, with a revolver in either hand.

They half started to their feet.

"Be quiet; do not venture to make a move—for the man who does so dies in a hurry."

Sam and his side-partner had taken advantage of the moment of surprise to crawl the rebels, while they had yielded up to explain his story in a far different manner than they dreamed.

Kit's two stanch friends, each stood holding a brace of cocked revolvers, ready to use them, unless the rebels caved gracefully.

"Trapped!" groaned the spokesman.

"And by three infernal Yanks, whose heads we couldn't blow the whole lot off."

"Do you surrender?"

Calmly Kit spoke, his tone being one that indicated that he meant business.

CHAPTER III.

CORNERED.

"Do you surrender?"

So Kit had demanded.

A verbal reply was hardly necessary. The bowed heads and crestfallen looks of the guerrillas fully answered the question.

Had they been cornered in a fight, hemmed in by superior forces, it would not have been so hard to surrender; but it came awful tough for ten men to surrender to three, who had only a short time before been so completely in their power, and by a trick so simple that a child might have seen through it at once.

But even though their captors were only three in number, they saw that they were caught as securely as though the number had been thirty.

"Put up your hands!" Kit now ordered.

There was no help for it; they could only obey.

With a groan they raised their hands.

"Now, come forward one at a time!" was the next order.

While Kit and Sam kept the others cowering, the rebel who advanced had his hands tied behind him by the third soldier, tight enough to prevent his using them, yet loose enough to not interfere with his ability to march.

Each of the ten had been thus disposed of. Kit formed them into line and marched them out of the woods.

Less than half a mile away was the remaining number of the scouting party, with their horses.

Having reached him, Kit and his companions mounted, and the cursing and crestfallen rebels were ordered to advance.

Sam and Kit rode in the rear of the captives, while the other two led the way.

Sam's tone was very grave.

"Well, what do you think, Kit's rejoinder."

"Do you really mean to try and take them chaps into camp?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"It's risky."

"I don't think it can be done."

"Isn't it possible?"

"Yes, but not probable. You know we've got a stretch of nearly five miles through a rebel country."

"I know it."

"We'll get cornered."

"Perhaps so," assented Kit. "But," he added, "if you don't have a good luck as has attended us ever since we started."

"Luck is a bad thing to depend on."

"I know it, Sam, and if you say so, I'll let the rebels go, and spur for camp. You see I put a good deal of faith in your judgment."

Sam was silent.

"Well, what do you say?"

Kit glanced keenly at Sam as he asked the question.

"It would be something to talk about, wouldn't it, if we could only run them fellows in?" he said, wistfully.

"That it would."

"I don't know as I'd feel comfortable if we was to let 'em go."

"Nor I."

"You ain't afraid to risk it?"

"No."

"Then I won't be," said Sam, resolutely.

"We'll take 'em into camp or —"

"Or, what?"

"Or we won't get there ourselves," Sam quickly finished.

That was a mighty risky thing they had started out to do.

For a distance of five miles they must pass through an enemy's country at a walk, for the rebels were too far gone to fight.

Soon after, they passed a small house.

A woman was in the window, who gazed curiously at them as they filed past.

Looking behind, after passing the house, Kit saw that a man's face was at the window beside the woman's.

"That settles it," he muttered. "He will give the alarm, and an attempt at rescue will be made."

"Start the rebels at double-quick," suggested Sam Black.

The order was given; and, for a distance of a mile, the prisoners covered the ground at a rapid pace, and then, being winded, they fell into a walk.

Kit's fears of an attempt at rescue were well founded.

One of the men who had seen them, dashed swiftly hither and thither, relating what he had seen; and, when camp was still two miles away, Kit heard the tramp of horse men in the rear.

He glanced behind.

A dozen mounted men were in pursuit.

An expression of chagrin crossed the faces of all four of the scouting party.

"What can we do, Sam?" asked Kit.

"I don't know."

"Can't you think of something?"

"No—except it is to cut and run, if we were to lose our own bacon," was the reluctant reply.

"You see no way of hanging on to our prisoners?"

"No, I don't. Do you?"

"I wish I did."

The rebels meanwhile were muttering excitedly to themselves.

Escape was sure, or so they thought, and they began to gloat over the vengeance they would help wreak on the heads of the daring and cursed Yanks.

Until the very last minute consistent with duty did Kit wait; and then his lips began to give the order to press on and leave the prisoners to themselves.

The order was not given.

The words died on his lips. Less than a quarter of a mile ahead he saw a party of horsemen, perhaps a dozen in number.

One glance informed him that they were rebels.

They had taken a short cut across country and headed him off.

"The devil!" gasped Sam.

"We're in a fix now," grunted one of the men in advance.

"Between two fires," said the other.

Involuntarily they came to a halt.

They were in a very unenviable position, for, on either side, the tables were turned and they became prisoners they could be called to account as spies.

What was to be done?

For one minute after seeing how he had been trapped, Kit was deadly pale. But, with the exception of that minute he remained calm and clear-headed throughout.

At first he thought of deserting the roads and giving them a wild chase across country, but as his eye swept the landscape on either side of the road the idea was abandoned, for the conformation of the ground could only result in throwing him more certainly into the hands of the Confederates.

"Shall we try to cut through 'em?" so asked Sam, in a hoarse voice.

"But you don't intend to stand here and be slaughtered, or else saved for hanging as a spy?"

"No."

Kit halted him.

"See that log cabin there?"

"Yes."

"Then, we're going to take refuge there."

"And be burned out like rats?" said Sam.

"No; we're going to take the prisoners in with us."

"And the horses?"

"We're going to leave them outside."

The exultant expression died out of the faces of the captive guerrillas when they were ordered to advance toward the log hut.

They had thought rescue certain, but now foresaw a possibility of not escaping at all.

They hung back, delaying as much as they dared, until at last Sam deliberately winged one of them.

Impressed by this with the idea that business was meant they hung back no longer, but scampered across the intervening space and bolted through the open door into the hut.

Before the door the scouts dismounted, and after turning their horses loose with a sign, sprung inside just in season to escape a volley from the rebels, and then closed and barricaded the door.

With a wild yell the rebels rushed up; but for the present, at least, the Federal scouts were safe from their vengeful fury.

"Batter down the door!" suddenly cried somebody, and instantly a rush was made for the door.

"We must put a stop to that," exclaimed Kit.

"Right!" said Sam.

"Can you manage to sight 'em?"

"Yes."

"We're one."

"Correct!"

Crack!

Then came a howl of pain, rising high and clear above all other sounds.

It was only the rebels retreating.

They did not halt until they were out of rifle shot.

"Think they'll come back?" asked one of Kit's men.

"Come back?" repeated Sam, in an ironical tone, as much as to say that only a fool would ask the question. "Of course they'll come back. Why, I suppose they're going to carve afore four men."

"But what can they do?"

"That remains to be seen."

An hour passed.

The captive guerrillas cursed their luck most bitterly, alternating, with expressing fierce hopes of a speedy rescue.

"Our boys have got you cornered, curse you!" one of them said to Kit; "and if they get at you they'll hang every mother's son of you."

"Perhaps!" said Kit, sternly. "But you will not be there to see the hanging!"

Kit spoke significantly.

The fellow cowered and cringed, and said no more.

Meanwhile the would-be rescuers had had to council to decide on the best steps to take.

Suggestions had been made by scores, but when all were boiled down to hard pan, it became evident that if they were to rescue the captured rebels it must be by one of two methods—assault or siege.

Time was too valuable to expend in trying to starve out the Federals.

For an assault meant sure death for some of them, and not a man there was in any hurry to die.

Courage was finally plucked up, and a wild charge was made.

Kit saw it coming.

"Be ready, boys!" he cried. "Here they come! When they get near enough so that you can be sure of hitting your mark let drive."

"Ay, ay!" came the hoarse reply.

A minute, and then four shots rang out in rapid succession, sending two men headlong to the earth. Two others turned tail and went limping away.

Then came a crash of musketry as the rebels poured a volley into the hut.

They were answered by the revolvers of Kit and Sam, and with such good effect that the rebels began to retreat.

"The backbone of that assault is broken, I guess," remarked Kit, grimly.

The losses suffered by the rebels infuriated them to that degree that they began to lose all thoughts of personal fear, as Kit had shrewdly suspected might be the case.

"We're in for it now," he said, as he watched the preparations that were being made for a new attack. "If it were not for the fact that we have these guerrillas here with us, whom they do not wish to injure, I am afraid it would go hard with us if those devils got at us."

Consideration alone for their captive comrades checked a warfare that would have approached its climax.

The Confederates, but for the fact mentioned, would undoubtedly have burned the building around our hero's ears, consigning him and his companions to a fearful death.

Now they had secured a heavy piece of timber, which they evidently designed using as a battering ram.

Kit was very grave.

He could only comprehend the extreme peril in which they stood.

"We must be ready, boys," he said, the words coming with a hissing sound from between his set teeth. "They must not be allowed to burst in the door. Fire to one odds that we cannot stand up against in a hand to hand struggle."

Suppose we do prevent their bursting in the door?" said Sam.

As he spoke his eyes met Kit's.

"Suppose we do?" returned the latter.

"What is to be the end?"

"There any hope?"

"You want an honest opinion?"

"I do."

"Then I believe that our goose is cooked, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless a scouting party of our boys, or a squad of cavalry should chance to come this way."

It was a dismal outlook.

The odds were against a party of the Federals chancing in the vicinity.

The very desperation of their circumstances made a tiger of each man, and grinding their teeth, they took advantageous positions to check the advancing party with the ram.

They were not kept waiting a great while.

With a wild rush, the enraged rebels tore across the open space before the hut, carrying the heavy timber, one stroke of which would certainly force the door off its hinges.

"The Union forever!" cried Kit, and then taking hasty aim, pulled the trigger.

Crack!

A man went down.

"The Union forever!" hoarsely yelled Kit's companions, and then three more shots rang out.

Each shot had told.

The four leading men had bitten the dust.

The unsupported end of the timber fell heavily to the ground, jarring those in the rear so suddenly that it was wrenching from their grasp, and the heavy log lay stretched on the ground.

The moment the revolvers spoke, the rebels began to retreat, a tiger, again, worsted, panic-stricken, cursing in mad fury.

"If we can only keep them at bay," muttered Kit, as a new thought crossed his mind. "If only our gun, help may reach us. This firing may attract attention and lead to the sending of a force of cavalry in this direction."

The next move on the part of the rebels was to send a man forward, bearing a flag of truce.

"What do you want?" demanded Kit, when the man halted near the hut.

"I have come to demand that you surrender to us," was the reply.

Kit laughed, scornfully.

"You make a very modest request," he said, sarcastically.

"You refuse to surrender, then?"

"Most emphatically."

"Are you aware that we outnumber you, six to one, and reinforcements constantly arriving?"

"I am."

"You won't surrender?"

"No."

"You will do so if you are wise," urged the messenger. "If you resist longer, why, when you are taken, you will be fairly eaten alive."

"With salt and pepper, or without?" asked Kit, calmly, casting the face of the flag-bearer to purple with rage.

"You'll sing a different tune presently," he howled. "When you are prisoners—"

"When we are," interrupted Kit.

"You will be torn limb from limb. We want you—"

"Then come and take us," again interrupted Kit.

"We mean to have you," finished the flag-bearer, grinding his teeth.

"That will do," Kit now calmly and sternly said. "The protection of a flag of truce does not give you gross insults, and unless you are out of range in five seconds I will order my men to shoot you down."

The fellow waited for no more.

Off he darted, dropping the stick with the white handkerchief attached, which had been converted into a flag of truce.

"I guess we can expect some fun presently," remarked Sam to himself.

He made no mistake.

From some unknown quarter the rebels had fished up a small cannon, a field-piece, and this they could be seen planting so as to bear the hut.

In their rage and mad desire to capture or kill the defiant Yanks all thought of the safety of the guerrillas within the hut was lost sight of; it would never do to let such plucky and determined fellows get back to their commander alive.

"I'm afraid that settles us," said Kit, soberly. "Well, I shall be satisfied to die if called on to do so, for I know that I have done my best."

With the increase of their peril and the growing certainty that they would be slaughtered, Sam had apparently grown more calm and careless as to the result.

Taking a fresh chew of tobacco, he remarked, as he thrust it into his cheek with his tongue:

"I can't say as I'm ready to kick the bucket yet. I want to have the pleasure of kicking a few more of them scoundrels first."

In spite of the gravity of the situation Kit could not help smiling.

"Sam!" he cried, a new idea flashing into his mind.

"What's struck you now?"

"Yourself and the boys must fire off your muskets at short intervals."

"But the rebels are too far away to be hit."

"I know it. But if we keep up a continuous firing it may result in drawing a squad of cavalry in this direction to see what it means."

Sam nodded approbation.

"But they'll have to get there mighty quick, 'cause once that cannon gets to work on us those quarters'll get to be mighty hot."

At short intervals during the next few minutes the muskets were discharged, being aimed at the distant rebels, who, the bullets falling far short, uttered derisive cries.

They seemed not to comprehend the real reason why they were being fired.

At last the cannon was ready.

The besieged Unionists saw it charged with powder, and saw the large stone that was put in because of having no balls.

A moment of suspense followed.

Then a match was struck.

It was placed at the touch-hole.

There was a flash—then a huff of smoke.

Boom!

Closely following, that the two sounds blended in Kit's ears, came a crash!

Then from the throats of the rebels issued a wild cry of savage delight.

The missiles which had been ejected from the black throat of the cannon had crashed through the door, putting a hole in it and splintering it badly.

It was, in fact, a wreck, hanging loosely on its hinges.

But nobody had been harmed, and Kit breathed a deep sigh of relief.

Once again the engine of destruction was loaded, and once again it belched forth its deadly and smoky and deadly missile.

Once again the door was struck.

A wreck already, the second shot demolished it completely.

Then came a third yell.

The rebels were about to charge.

"To the door boys!" yelled Kit. "Sam, you take the right hand side, and I'll take the left."

So the door they sprang.

The other two were separated, one supporting Kit, the other lending Sam the assistance of his sturdy arm.

On came the rebels, with a rush and a blood-chilling yell.

"Keep cool, boys, and make every shot count!" cried Kit; and he and the others braced themselves for the coming shock.

Kit did not wait for the enemy to open the ball.

He knew the virtue of having the first blow, and when he set the example his companions speedily followed suit.

Up to the very threshold came the madened rebels—but no further!

There they were held in check.

Standing a little aside were the four brave men, out of the line of the rebel fire, but ready to send the last account each man who dared advance across the threshold.

At last their revolvers were emptied.

They had no time to load up.

Then the muskets were used as such short range for their legitimate purposes; but those daring valiant men seized them by the barrels and used them as clubs with excellent results.

"They can't shoot any more!" yelled one of the rebels furthest from the door. "One grand rush, boys, and you've got 'em."

Kit was pale as death.

The end was now close at hand.

Inspired by these practical words of a man who himself shirked danger, the hardier of the rebels made a combined rush through the doorway.

And then, as they went down; but the brave defenders could not cope with the swarm that came pouring in, and in a minute more Kit and his men would have been hurled into eternity but for a sudden cry that went up from the throats of those who remained outside.

"The cavalry are coming!"

That was the unexpected cry which put a new aspect on the face of affairs.

That was the cry which caused the Confederates to pause, even on the point of

wreaking their vengeance on their cornered foes.

The hands clutching cocked and ready revolvers fell to the sides of their owners.

Every man caught his breath.

Kits and rebels assaulted bent their heads to listen.

There could be no mistaking the sound which floated to their ears, each second growing louder and more distinct as it swept closer and closer.

It was the rushing tramp of horses' feet, as a body of cavalry came sweeping along.

With a wild cry of baffled rage, the rebels turned for the door.

"Hurry—hurry!" screamed those outside.

"They're coming like the wind; there's no time to spare!"

A panic seized the rebels, and they shrieked and groined and cursed as they fled, completely forgetting the vengeance they had sworn against four of that armed foe which had invaded their country.

All thought of those four men had fled.

Vengeance was forgotten.

They only knew that a superior force was at hand and that they must seek safety in flight.

As they rushed toward the horses, and every man who was able to mount was soon scurrying away across country as if Old Nick himself was in pursuit.

As Kit had hoped would be the case the firing had been heard.

At first no attention had been paid to it, but, when it continued, an order had been given to investigate its cause.

The cavalry commander did not think it worth while to pursue the fleeing men.

The dead and wounded he left where they were, to be cared for by their friends.

Kit and his companions, each of whom had wanted to commence the action, regained their horses, and, under escort of the cavalry, went back to camp, carrying with them the guerrillas captured in the ravine.

The cannon which had done the rebels such good service, although worth nothing much save as old iron, was also taken along as a trophy.

Great was the meed of praise awarded Kit for his gallant reconnoitering expedition, and his commander personally thanked him for the valuable information concerning the ravine.

That night Kit was surrounded by his friends and comrades as made to recount the stirring story of the day's exploits.

The night was cold, and close gathered around the camp-fire the men listened with bated breath.

CHAPTER IV.

FORT DONELSON.

The month was February—not the February of our Northern states, but still cold and raw and disagreeable.

On the tenth of that month Fort's flotilla opened fire on Fort Donelson.

A steady stream of shot and shell poured into the fort, and in two hours their batteries were silenced.

Many of the infantry (the land force) grated their teeth with anger when the fort no longer returned the fire.

"By gum!" granted our friend Sam, "if that ain't too bad I don't know what is. Here the fort's silenced and practically taken without us fellows getting even a crack at 'em."

"Don't get uneasy," was Kit's quiet rejoinder. "This thing ain't over yet."

Nor was it.

The batteries that were silenced opened fire again, and so furious and fast did they send forth their shrieking shot and shell that the flotilla was compelled to retire.

"Forward!"

The order came at last.

To the men who had been under fire, who knew something of the horrors of battle, it was the cause of gravity.

But among those who fancied that they had more chance to perform, as many of the new recruits did, there was much laughter and merriment.

That night they bivouacked on the bare ground.

They were in fighting trim, but had no supply of rations, and many a man went hungry that night, as will be testified to by many a hoary veteran who took part in that campaign.

It was very cold, and they were not allowed to build fires, as a consequence of which the sufferings of many of the gallant boys were greater than can be described.

To have had down to sleep all night might

have been to invite a death by freezing, so they slept and watched by groups, changing every hour or so, the waking one trotting up and down to keep the blood in circulation.

Ye heroes of Fort Donelson!

Your names have never been sung as they should be, and we are thankful that it is within our power to pay even so humble a tribute as ours.

On the morning of the eleventh, at day-break, a heavy force of rebel infantry rushed out upon the right wing of the Union army.

The onset was terrible. It was sublime—grand beyond description.

Like a deluge came the grays full of fire, impetuous, flushed with the memory of past victories, determined to add another to the list.

On they came with that wild yell which struck terror, when first heard, into the heart of the new recruit.

And the boys in blue. Where were they? They were in their places.

As they rushed to the honor and glory of the Union boys before Fort Donelson, they were in their places, and there they stood like rocks!

Many were so numb and stiff from the intense cold of the past night, spent unsheltered on the frozen earth, that for a time they could scarcely move, and could not handle their muskets.

But they could stand.

And as they did, and breasted the shock of that seemingly irresistible tide of gray that had come with a rush and yet with a precision of movement that was majestic.

As the persistent shock, and it started the chilled blood, it caused their hearts to beat more rapidly, it limbered their limbs, it took the numbness from their fingers.

And then—

"Stand steady them!"

"Make ready! Aim! Fire!"

Then a deadly volley of musketry came—a volley which made gaps in the close ranks of gray.

Once again the orders were given, and once again that great sheet of flame leaped from the muzzles of the grim weapons so ably handled, and the thousands of bullets they belched forth, and many a man prone on the earth never to rise again.

It was fearful to behold.

Again and again—and oh! how gallantly the Confederates charged.

Again and again were they met by that immovable phalanx of the boys in blue.

Grandy the grays fought, but more grandly they resisted!

Thus for a time—and then along the line came the inspiring command:

"Forward!"

Forward went the boys in blue.

Not far, to be sure.

They did not sit, and held it while they threw up their breasts and received another of those grand but fruitless charges of their enemies in gray.

The grays repulsed—once again came the command:

"Forward!"

Forward they went again.

Foot by foot they went again; and at last the invincible blues were left possessors of the field.

The first blow for the capture of Fort Donelson had been struck.

For a short space, a few brief hours, there was lull in the tempest, and the leaden hurrican of death was unheeded.

Then a courier dashed over the field.

He bore a message from Grant to Smith in command of the left wing.

It was to this effect:

"Carry the enemy's intrenchments by assault."

It was to the point.

No provision had been made for such a thing as failure.

It must be accomplished.

And then, steady, with even tread, the lines moved forward.

The desultory firing ceased.

Spellbound, everybody watched the lines of blue as they moved steadily onward—onward—onward—for some never to come back.

And, beyond the heavy thud, as the even tread upon the earth, there crept over everything a deep and solemn hush.

It lasted only a brief space—only until the boys in blue drew near enough to be fired upon.

Then the silence was disturbed by a terrible sound—the crack of a thousand muskets and the demoniac shriek of as many musket balls, whistling and whizzing through the air at the same time.

No preparation was made in the ranks of the gallant boys in blue.

Marching beside Sam was one of those who had accompanied Kit and himself on the scouting expedition.

At the first fire he went down.

A bullet had entered his brain.

Sam ground his teeth, fire flashed from his eyes, and his lips were grimly closed and compressed.

And when the order came to fire no man was sooner to respond than was Sam.

Again and again were deadly volleys poured into that devoted band of brothers in arms.

Again and again were huge gaps left in the lines. And, again and again, were they pressed and closed up.

Shoulder to shoulder the gallant fellows shoved ahead, until they stood close to the intrenchments they had come to capture.

"Charge!"

"At last the order came.

Then forward—as if shot from some tremendous catapult.

Now came the hand to hand battle.

The slaughter was terrible.

Men were swept away like chaff.

One after another the officers had fallen; but still those heroes battled on, each man and each company fighting for its own life.

Then came a wild cry.

It was from Union throats, and proclaimed victory.

The defeated rebels heard the cry, and it roused in them a frenzy that for the moment swept away all fear.

They turned, then formed and back they came to renew the struggle on top of the broken works.

Desperate and reckless, they fought like very devils; and along that line of blue there was seen a wavering and uncertainty.

They looked from one to another.

No voice came from them.

No officer was near to lend his voice to inspire them.

The officers were not shirking their duty.

Al—no—no! They were silent only because they could not speak, because they laid dead or dying in the intrenchments they had come to capture.

Could they?

Were the boys in blue to be driven back now for want of some noble fellow to fling himself in the reach and cry:

"Stand your ground, boys; it is the last gasp of death!"

Such was not to be.

"The Union forever!"

A clarion voice rang out this battle-cry, and the rebel ranks split it up, and in a great volume went up the cry:

"The Union forever?"

And then to the front sprang a tall commanding figure and those who recognized him uttered a wild shout of joy.

"Kit, from Kentucky!"

It was indeed Kit Langdon.

"Hurrah!" he yelled.

Here his voice caught up the cry as they had caught up the other, and there came a stentorian:

"Hurrah!"

"Now, strike for the Union—strike for the stars and stripes—strike for victory. Forward!"

Madly, blindly, they followed his lead.

They were irresistible.

The rebels broke; they fled—they left their works in the hands of the enemy.

And a wild shout of victory went up, announcing that the dearly bought victory was won.

New reinforcements were thrown forward, and the captured point made secure beyond recapture.

Now came the attack at the center.

And again the boys in blue met and drove back as gallant a foe as ever opposed an armed force.

The darkness of night closed in once more—a night like the preceding, when the brave and gallant boys in blue, in spite of their fatigue, were compelled for the most part to keep awake and stirring because of the unusually intense cold.

But although what sleep they obtained was on the frozen earth, with no shelter save the sky above their heads, the breaking of day did not find them dispirited.

They were full of enthusiasm, and only wanted the word of command to do and dare anything.

Gallant boys of Fort Donelson!

Each one of each one of you should be inscribed in letters of gold, where all the world might read and learn the names of as gallant men as ever battled for right, truth and honor!

There was one there deserving of special remembrance.

It was Kit, from Kentucky.

He was ordered to be promoted on the field of battle as a fitting reward for his gallant assumption of the lead at a moment when the absence of a leader might have resulted in a failure to hold the intrenchments, to obtain which so much blood had been shed.

Modestly, and like his own true self, Kit accepted the acknowledgment of his meritorious action, but declined the office to which it was desired to raise him.

"I would rather be in the ranks," he had answered, when an objection was raised against his refusal. "I trust I am a good private, and I would rather remain such than run the risk of being a poor officer."

"Of which, Heaven knows, there are enough in the service," said the commissioning officer who had been sent to see him. Kit's earnestness was not to be mistaken, and his desires were complied with in that he was not forced into taking a position he did not covet, and in fact was averse to accepting.

A few days passed.

General Grant—clear-headed, bull-dog Grant—had made all his dispositions for a final attack, which all Confederates and Union men—forever meant the fall of Fort Donelson.

The morning of the sixteenth of February dawned.

Everything was in readiness for the attack.

Then came a messenger from the fort.

The Confederate commander, General Buckner, had asked for an armistice pending terms of capitulation.*

There was no waste of time in framing a reply. It was in a few words, and very much to the point.

"No terms except unconditional and immediate surrender can be acceptable. I propose to move immediately on your works."

U. S. GRANT.

Would the rebels surrender as they demanded?

A brief time was given for reply.

It came at the last moment of grace.

General Buckner, who had been left in command by the flight up the river of Floyd and Pillow during the night, could not up himself, and he was forced to surrender at discretion.

Such was the tenor of the reply.

Then up rose such a cheer as never before was heard, as the news traveled down the lines.

The effect was electrical throughout the country, and even in Europe those who were secretly in sympathy with the South thought it wise to deal with the rebels more circumspectly for the future.

History tells us that with the surrender of Fort Donelson there were not far from fifteen thousand prisoners, counting the wounded, seventeen heavy guns, forty field pieces, and a great amount of supplies and munitions of war.

In the newspaper accounts of the affair appeared the names of many of the heroes engaged in the affray. Kit Langdon's name was not infrequently mentioned. But among all who print received a share of the glory, there was not one who bore his honors more modestly than Kit, from Kentucky.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE MOUNTAINS.

Meanwhile, how fared those loved ones whom Kit had left behind?

They were as safe and secure in their mountain retreat as Kit could wish them to be?

To answer these questions we must turn back to the time when Kit bade them good-by, and fled to the mountains, and sought his own safety in immediate flight, leaving them under the care of his gallant but misguided brother, who had cast his fortunes with him.

It was a very sad party that ascended the mountains on that night on which our story opens.

As a clergyman, Mr. Langdon was naturally averse to the shedding of blood.

He deplored the fact that his two noble and gallant sons had seen it to be their duty to take up arms in the great conflict.

He could have borne it more easily had both espoused what he considered the cause of humanity—viz: the Union army.

He had no word of reproach for Ben because he had joined the Confederates.

* In a capitulation certain honors are obtained, according to the terms of the surrender. The surrender place themselves unconditionally in the hands of the victors, who have discretion to do as they may see fit.

He believed in living up to principles, and had Ben believed the South to be in the right, and then had fought against it, the stern side of the old man's character would have come into view, and he would have at once disowned Ben.

Although he honored and respected both of his sons for acting so true to their principles, this fact could not rob of its horror the knowledge that they had espoused different sides, that the bitter battle would practically seek the other's blood.

As for the gentle mother, she was grieved and saddened to her very heart's core.

Her convictions as to the right or wrong in the great struggle were not so clearly defined as her husband's, and she looked more to the result as to her loved boys than to the success or defeat of either army.

She loved them both equally, and she could not honestly express a wish that either North or South should win, although as Mr. Langdon's sympathies were with the North she naturally inclined that way.

As for Belle, pretty, high-spirited Belle, her sentiments were true blue, even though there was one in the rebel army whose wife she some day expected to be.

So it was that the night that went up into the wilds of the mountains that night.

As last the way grew so rough that the rays of the moonlight were insufficient, and they rested during the day, pursuing a course of resting and awaiting the coming day.

When it had dawned, they resumed their wearying journey, made more tiresome by the fact that each of them bore some necessary articles.

At last, late in the afternoon, they reached a little valley, about two hundred feet in width and a thousand in length.

Here Ben decided that they should remain, as a good spring near by would furnish an ample supply of water.

Axes were at once put to work, and in less than a week a rude shelter—a hut made of rude dressed logs—had been constructed.

As everybody in that section of Kentucky had done, Mr. Langdon had owned some negroes.

Years before he had practically given them their freedom.

He had called them to him one by one and had told them that when they worked out their purchase price they should be free; and that they might remain and work for him at regular wages, and he would credit them with their earnings, or they might work for somebody else and pay him what they could save.

They had always had a good home, had been treated kindly, and all had remained with the Langdons, and never were human beings more faithful than the four negroes—two men and two women—were to that kind family.

Notably they did their share now.

While Ben and Mr. Langdon constructed the hut, the men and women had been withdrawn from the parsonage when it was found that the bird had flown—brought to the mountains several wagon loads of furniture and agricultural implements, and such other things as were needed.

Then, retaining one man and one woman, Mr. Langdon gave the other two papers showing that they were free, and bade them go North to Ohio.

It was then too late in the season to attempt to till the earth, but Mr. Langdon made what preparations he could to pass the winter comfortably in the mountains.

Ben remained as long as he could, and then sadly bade them good-by.

"Good-by, mother," he said, his voice husky with emotion.

He put his arm gently about her waist, and pressed her long and lovingly to his heart.

"Good-by, my boy," she returned, with the tears gushing from her cheeks, "I have guarded over and preserve you to return to me."

"Amen," he said, solemnly.

"But, my benighted Ben," she added, struggling to appear brave, and to look possibilities fairly in the face "if it should be that you do not come back—if we should never meet again on earth—you will meet me in Heaven."

She pointed upward and raised her eyes.

"With God's help, I will," he said, in a tone as solemn as her own.

Then he kissed her hastily and went outside.

Just beyond the door he found his fathers, and silently their hands met.

It was a silence more eloquent than words. For they stood thus, their hands clasped, looking steadily into each

other's eyes, and then they as stently unclosed their hands and separated.

Perhaps for a little while—perhaps forever!

Ben glanced about him.

Where was Belle?

He could see nothing of her near the house, and moved slowly away in the direction he must take to get out of the mountain.

He knew his sister too well to believe that she would evade the parting, and he judged that he would find her waiting for him not far away.

He was right.

Had said good-by to the negroes, and had passed out of sight of the house, when he came upon Belle.

"I have been waiting for you here," said the girl, gently and sedately.

"I knew I should find you somewhere," he said, as he paused in front of her and took both of her hands in his own.

"You must go, Ben?"

"Yes."

"You believe the South right?"

"I do."

"After sober reflection?"

"After sober reflection."

"Then go, my brother! Do your duty as you see it, and I will always love and respect you. But, oh! how much happier I should be were you going to fight side by side with Kit instead of against him."

"Regrets are useless, my dear sister. The die is cast. Let God decide between the North and the South."

"And if he decides against you, will you accept the result cheerfully, and without bitterness of heart?"

"I will. I swear it to you, little sister. If God rules that the North shall win in this struggle I will permit myself to harbor no feeling of bitterness, but will bend myself to His will."

"You have lightened my heart, Ben. I feel now that I can let you go."

"And, Belle, there is another—"

He paused and gazed down on her sweet wistful face, half curiously, half tenderly.

"Yes," she said, gravely.

"You will cheer and help each other?"

"Of course we shall. But, Belle, in case I see Harry Briggs, have you no message you wish given to him?"

"None," she said; "That, if he has taken up arms against his country because he believes it to be the call of duty, I forgive him as freely as I do you."

"And have you no word of love to send? He loved you, Belle, and loves you still, with a love surpassing great."

"Tell him I shall wait for him."

"And that is all?"

"And for myself?"

"My blessing go with you, Ben; and when the war is ended, God grant you may return with no bitterness in your heart toward the victorious."

"You're a rank Unionist."

"I am."

"Well, we'll not quarrel. Good-by."

"Good-by, Ben."

As she uttered the last adieu her voice broke, and he could feel her trembling like a leaf.

Silently he pressed her to his breast.

When he would have released her he saw that she was so overcome by emotion that she could not stand; so he gently deposited her on the grassy bank, and without another word strode away.

After a minute or so she struggled to her feet, and watched his receding figure with a loving gaze.

When he had disappeared, she turned and wearily looked toward the new house, a home destined to be the theater of many exciting scenes in the month to come.

In less than a week after Ben's departure there had company in the mountains.

Other families of Union tendencies were forced to flee to the mountains for safety, and, indeed, it was only a short while before the hills and valleys were quite thickly populated.

This gave room for the operations of those bands of guerrillas, which, more than the regular armies, supply the most horrible features of a war, in the name of which they prey on friends and foes alike.

It was not long before news of the little settlement in the mountains reached the ears of one of the lesser guerrilla chiefs—by name Buck Toole.

One day in December, when the snow was on the ground, he suddenly appeared in the settlement with his rascally followers—numbering about a dozen.

It was a small band, but sufficiently large to hold in terror the women and children, who for the most part comprised the inhabitants of the spot.

The men—husbands and fathers—had gone to the front, after conveying their families into the mountains for greater safety.

There were only three grown men, including Mr. Langdon, within a circuit of a mile. There were half dozen or more of vigorous fourteen and fifteen year old boys, but they did not count for much at such a time.

So, when Buck Toole made his appearance on that day in December he found himself master of the situation, for no blow could be struck in its defense.

In gruff tones he commanded the families there to shelter his men, and give them the best food and drink they had.

"For," said he, "we're going to stay with you a few days, and it's just as well to have us your friends as your enemies."

The men were divided around among the different families.

Buck Toole coolly quartered himself on the minister.

Mr. Langdon very calmly saw his approach, and very calmly acquiesced when Toole stated his intention of quartering there.

Toole, believing this quietness was cowardice, went inside and flinging himself into a chair, lifted his heels and put them on the table.

"Take down your feet!"

Buck Toole was surprised.

Could that firm and menacing voice issue from the minister's lips?

"Take down your feet!"

There was a gleam in the minister's eye that Buck did not like.

Toole crossed his feet.

Then he opened his mouth, and an oath half crossed his lips, when a voice sternly interrupted:

"Stop now—stop!"

"Who're you orderin'?"

"You."

"Why, do you dare—"

"Yes, I dare."

"Boss me?"

"Yes, within my own walls."

"Why, what could you do?"

"Do?"

"Yes do."

"Try me, and you may find out to your disgust," Mr. Langdon quietly said.

Buck felt uncomfortable.

Of true courage he did not possess a particle, but he was chock full of bravado, and in the eyes of his men was a perfect lion.

He felt more meek in the presence of Mr. Langdon than he ever had felt before any man. And why? He could not tell.

Mr. Langdon was not the highest type of a muscular man, yet he had a frame and build that induced respect for his muscles.

After that "try me" of Mr. Langdon's, Buck forced a laugh. It was intended to imply a contempt for the other's words.

About half an hour later, Belle came from the back room for the purpose of setting the table for the afternoon meal.

Years before, when Belle was a child, Buck had seen her, and had been quite captivated by her, and his unholy eyes no sooner rested upon her on this day than he resolved that he would use his power to force her to his arms.

While he watched her as she went to and fro, and developed plans in his mind, she finished preparations for the meal.

"We are ready now, father," she at last said.

"Then, let us pray."

As Mr. Langdon spoke he knelt down beside his chair, a movement that was copied by his wife and daughter, as well as the negro woman in the kitchen that had been extended at the back.

All knelt save Buck.

Mr. Langdon looked at Buck keenly.

"Let us be quiet, but not still."

"Kneel!" said the minister.

Buck folded his arms and settled himself suitably into his chair.

"Kneel!"

"I won't."

"Then go outdoors until my prayer is finished."

"Into the cold?"

"I'll not do it."

"Then kneel."

"I won't."

Slowly rose Mr. Langdon, rubbed them together, reached out and took Buck by the collar and yanked him toward the door.

Belle opened it, and the next moment

Buck was sprawling in the snow outside.

The door closed, and when Buck appeared it was to hear the parson's voice raised in prayer, as calmly as though nothing had happened.

Prudence and policy combined to cause Buck to take his treatment as a good joke instead of getting angry about it. He could easily have shot and killed Mr. Langdon but did not wish to do so; and he stood outside until he heard the "Amen" said, and then he entered.

A place had been made for him at the table.

"You're a fighting parson, I see," he said.

"In case of need I can use the strength which God has given me," was the quiet reply.

"I've seen you use it before," said Buck. "I remember a good many years ago, when I used to live in the village where you preached, that I saw you put a man out of church. He was flourishing a brace of pistols, and every man there was afraid to tackle him."

Buck laughed heartily at the recollection, but he had the laugh all to himself, for none of the others joined in.

Another conversation that was carried on by Buck and to himself. They evidently did not wish to talk with him, and were so little afraid of his power that they would do other than they wished.

This chafed and fretted the rascal. He kept himself within bounds by the reflection:

"I'll have my laugh last, when beautiful Belle marries me."

The villain was no fool, and he knew that it would be better for him could he gain his point without the use of violence.

He acted the most frank and agreeable part he could, but he might win his way to the hearts of his hosts.

He ventured once or twice to bend on Belle a look of admiration.

When a woman always grateful for an admiring look, even from a man she hates," he had told himself.

To his surprise, Belle was far from appreciating the compliment. She became actually afraid at once.

Buck saw that he was not progressing favorably, gnawed his fiercely-bristling mustache, and decided on a plan.

Rising and drawing out the grace possible, he thanked them for the entertainment afforded him, and added:

"My purpose here to-day—I tell you in confidence—was to protect you. Word had reached me that gangs of rascals were planning an attack, and I and my men came to help drive back the dastards."

"Is that the truth?" asked Mr. Langdon.

"Is."

"Then you are a better man than I gave you credit for. And is all danger over?"

"I think so, and yet I cannot be sure. I shall keep a watch over this little settlement. As for you, and have you not one parting word, Miss Belle?"

"Yes," and she looked fearlessly into his face, "and it is that I trust you will—if you must fight—go into the army instead of fighting like a sneak, running from a stronger force and attacking only the weak and defenseless."

He managed to smother his rage under a harsh laugh.

One day, he clinched his hands and swore to tame her haughty spirit, and bend her proud head at his beck.

In pursuance of his suddenly formed plan he got his men together and even though it was now dark gave for the light of the moon—descended the mountain.

After this visit, which had upset the little community in the mountains, everything went smooth and peacefully along for nearly a month.

One day a wild shriek rang through the little valley.

There was a rush in the direction whence the cry came.

It was to see Belle Langdon being swiftly borne away in the arms of a burly ruffian!

CHAPTER VI.

A PRISONER.

We have said that Kit bore gracefully the honors that were his because of his gallant conduct at Fort Donelson.

This fact, as might be expected, endeared him to the men about him, his companions in arms, and it gave for him the genuine respect of his superior.

He was spoken of as a model soldier, a man to do and dare, but without a spark of conceit.

It was not singular that the officers of rank should desire to see so great yet so modest a soldier.

And one day he was sent for by no less a personage than the commanding general himself.

It required a conversation of only a few minutes to show him that Kit Langdon was a man of superior ability as well as good education.

Office was again urged on Kit, and again he modestly declined it.

He was permitted to depart, but when he had gone word was sent to his captain to detail him as much as possible, and to relieve him from picket duty.

"It's good stuff in that fellow," was the general's expressed opinion; "and we must keep him in as good physical and fighting trim as possible."

Out of this order grew the circumstance that on the fifteenth of March, one month less one day after the capture of Fort Donelson, Kit was given a commission to execute that would take him ten miles to the rear of the army.

The country was a rebel one, nearly every family being Secession in sentiment, but the armed rebels were all to the south of the Union lines, the country conquered, and traveling was consequently safe—or at least so it was believed.

"Can I take a companion?" Kit asked.

"Certainly. Two, if you want them."

"I only want one."

"Who is it?"

"Sam Black."

"You're old comrade?"

"Yes."

"You've tried him?"

"I have."

"Well, take him."

Sam jumped at the chance of going with Kit, and in high glee they started, mounted on good horses.

They had left camp only a couple of miles behind them, when a little circumstance brought a grave expression to Kit's face.

A vulgar-faced woman, of lank, gaunt frame, laughed derisively as they cantered past her, and yelled after them:

"Johnnie Morgan's goin' to gobble you out of your shoes!"

The words of Morgan at that time was sufficient to strike terror into almost any Union heart.

Morgan's daring and reckless exploits were themes on every tongue, for his raids were never less successful than daring; and, although Kit said nothing, he knew that their success was not a little contributed to by his brother Ben.

"By the looks of your face, Kit, one would think you believed the woman spoke the truth," said Sam, suggestively.

"It's possible."

"Toll."

"It is, however."

"But not probable."

"Perhaps not. But, Sam, no man knows where Morgan may turn up at any minute."

"You're right about that. He's given our boys some big surprises. But, then, taint likely he'd run the risk of coming around in the rear of the Union army."

"The very thing that he'd be likely to do."

So said Kit.

Thenceforth they kept their eyes wide open, and whenever they met anybody whose looks impressed them favorably Kit would put some cautious questions.

He learned nothing that would either prove or disprove his fears until he encountered an aged negro.

The latter volunteered his information without being asked.

"Golly, gu-enenim, I'se done afeared dat Morgan's got yonse."

"Where he out dere?"

"Yes, massa."

"In this vicinity?"

"Yes, massa."

"So?"

"Pos'tive."

"Have you seen him?"

"No, but I'se heard."

"Where he heard dat?"

"I tink he's divided his forces, and part am on de fuss cross-road ahead."

"And de others?"

"On de road yonse just passed."

"Dat you?"

"Mus' go, massa."

"Dar comes my missy, an' if she seed dis chile, she'd ret her cat."

"I don't see her."

"Dar she is, dough!" exclaimed the negro,

with fear and trembling in his tone, and he put off as fast as he could go.

So they asked themselves, and had not reached the solution of the question when the mistress of the aged African drew near. There was visible on her face a vicious kind of smile that did not tend to reassure our friends.

They spoke to her, but she passed them with a haughty glance.

"Morgan's around!" said Kit.

"I believe so myself, now."

"Wonder if the negro knew exactly what he was talking about?"

"How?"

"About Morgan's forces being divided."

"I don't know," said Sam, thoughtfully.

"I hardly believe, though, that he could have got so good an idea of Morgan's movements."

"He has in part!"

Sam started as these emphasized words fell on his ears.

"What are you driving at?" he quickly asked.

"Just that!"

Kit pointed up the road in the direction in which they had been heading.

Nearly half a mile away they could see a large body of horsemen, which doubtless was a part of Morgan's force of cavalry.

"We must turn back," said Kit, regretfully.

"There is no help for it."

"Worse luck," growled Sam.

They turned about and went dashing back by the way they had come.

In a couple of minutes they swept by the mistress of the friendly negro, and they could hear her scornful laugh ringing in their ears.

"Devil take her!" exclaimed Sam, shaking his head angrily. "I'd like to teach her a lesson in politeness and humanity."

On they sped.

Soon they were not far from the other cross-road, at which the African had ventured the opinion that another part of Morgan's cavalry was advancing.

To be captured by Morgan was a fate not to be meted to the hearts of both beat faster as they drew near the road.

Unfortunately for them, a little piece of intervening timber made it necessary to get within a few hundred feet of the road before they could be seen.

They dared not halt and then go cautiously ahead, to reconnoiter, for they knew that they had been observed by the party behind them.

Their only course was to dash ahead and cross the intersecting road if possible.

If this could be safely done, they believed that, if they cut toward the road, they would find the road as free and unobstructed as when they had cantered along it so short a time ago.

On they went—on like the wind. The timber loomed up just ahead.

Beyond that ran the cross-road.

"Now, then, for a dash!" exclaimed Kit.

Into the flanks of their horses they plunged the rebores of their spurs, and the noble animals responded with a monstrous burst of speed.

The timber was reached.

As the stern command rang out, the road became suddenly alive with horsemen, who had been in covert in the woods.

The way forward was barred.

Kit whirled his horse around, and the noble animals responded with a monstrous burst of speed.

Perhaps, if he could get away, he might lead a chase across fields and escape.

Frutless hope.

The road was guarded equally well.

They had ridden fairly into an ambuscade, and were surrounded.

Kit's hand had leaped to the butt of a revolver.

"Surrender peaceably, if you know when you are well off," said a gruff voice. "Hands off of popguns, unless you want to be ridden as full of holes as a coal-sieve."

To fight was useless.

They were hopelessly involved.

"What is it to be, Kit?"

So asked Sam, a dogged look on his face, scowling at their captors, his hand still clutching his revolver.

If Kit gave the word he was ready to fight, all the frowning firearms in the world would not have prevented his drawing his weapons.

Kit was silent.

"What is it to be, Kit?" he asked again.

"Shall we let these fellows bag us, or shall we let 'em get bagged, and run the rest in?"

A hearty laugh on the part of the rebels followed this speech, and even Kit was com-

pelled to smile, little as he felt like it.

"I don't know, Sam, but that we might find some trouble in accomplishing the task," Kit now said. "These gentlemen seem to be a sociable lot of fellows, and, as they are so particularly urgent for our company, why perhaps it would be best to accommodate them."

It was a happy speech.

Those who heard it believed at once that Kit was a jolly happy-go-lucky fellow, who cared little whether school kept or not, and would about as soon fight on one side as the other.

"That's sensible," said the leader of the rebels. "Now, we'll take your weapons, if you please."

Kit handed over his weapons, and Sam did likewise, though he made an awful grimace as he did so.

"Now, then, put them with the other captives," said the commander, and as Kit and Sam were conducted away he heard the cry: "Here comes the other division."

Kit instantly guessed that for some reason the command had divided, appointing the intersection of those two roads as a rendezvous.

"Did you bag two Yanks?" was the first question that Morgan asked, as he came dashing up.

"Yes."

And now let us away again. The country is becoming aroused; word will soon reach the Union lines, and if we ain't well out of the way there'll be the devil to pay."

In less than five minutes the whole force was in motion.

The prisoners, including Kit and Sam, in number about forty, were placed in the center, and before starting were warned that any attempt at escape would be the signal for shooting them down.

Sam, however, was red-hot for trying to make a break at all hazards.

"No—no, Sam," protested Kit. "It would be sure death. Wait a while—take things cool—we may get a chance by and by that will be worth trying to make use of."

Several hours passed, and still that chance had not presented itself.

Meanwhile the number of prisoners kept rapidly increasing, several officers having been added to the score among others.

At last the victorious raiders came to a halt.

It was necessary, for the riding had been hard and fast, and the horses were much jaded.

"Halt for an hour!" had been the order given.

Morgan himself—the famous Morgan—with a grimly humorous light in his large, piercing eyes, approached to survey the prisoners.

He was a bold and dashing looking man, just suited in appearance to the deeds of daring which had made his name famous.

Kit looked at him curiously, as the chief of his brother Ben, for whom he had been looking ever since captured.

As yet he had failed to see anything of him, and a fear was beginning to creep into his heart that perhaps he should nevermore see that gallant and much-loved brother.

Morgan, when he halted, was very near Kit, and he held it on the end of his tongue, as the saying goes, to ask some question as to his brother.

He did not utter the words.

"It may strike him that I am trying to make capital for myself," he thought, "and I wish no favors from the rebel rascals that are granted to my fellow captives."

As Morgan's piercing eyes ran over the prisoners, many of the men quailed.

There was one pair of eyes which met his steadily and unflinchingly.

They were the eyes of Kit!

Perhaps it was partially on account of his handsome, war-like figure that Kit was especially favored by a longer continued scrutiny than any one else.

After scanning Kit from head to foot Morgan's eyes were lifted and fastened again on Kit's.

"You have a fearless eye, young man," he said.

"And you may add a fearless heart," calmly said Kit.

"Well said. Your eyes put me in mind of another pair I know of—of—of, you might easily be brothers. Where are you from?"

"Kentucky."

"Humph! then you'd ought to be fighting in a gray suit instead of a blue one."

"I am the best judge of that."

"Don't be impudent, sir," a gleam of anger in the large eyes.

"I have the same right to my opinions as you have to yours, and when you invite

them I would be a craven if fear led me to keep my mouth shut."

"I take it all back," said the dashing cavalry chieftain. "I see that you do not wear any straps, although I'll swear you deserve them. If you'll come over to our side I'll promise you a majority at the least."

"Never!" scornfully returned Kit.

"As you please," with a shrug of the shoulders.

As Morgan was about to turn away, one of his men spoke to him.

"That man you were talking to was the leader of that party of four which ran in twelve of our boys."

So this man told Morgan.

"The devil, you say?" and once again Kit was scrutinized. "He's a fine fellow. Ye gods! what a look! He'd do with a few hundred such as him behind my back."

While Morgan stood gazing wistfully at Kit, the latter saw one approaching, at sight of whom his heart leaped for joy.

It was Ben.

Ah! brave, noble Ben, who had so courageously faced that howling mob and saved his life.

But Ben never looked his way.

How he wished to call to him. But he would not.

He might have done, had Morgan not been near, but he would not while he could hear.

To Sam, who was close behind him, he said, and his tone was very fond and tender:

"Sam, is not that a noble looking fellow?"

"Yes," was the reluctant admission of Sam, who did not like to admit that there was anything good about any rebel.

"He's my brother."

"What?"

Sam stared in open-mouthed astonishment at Kit.

"It is true."

"Is he a rebel?"

"Yes."

Sam scratched his head.

"But me if I can understand it," he presently blurted out.

"It's easily understood. He believes the South is in the right and fights according to his convictions."

"Do you yet believe he is honest in that?"

"I know it."

Sam shook his head.

"If you say so, why—it's so. But I'd never believed it otherwise."

"Pshaw."

Sam suddenly gave utterance to a low whistle, and when Kit looked around winked knowingly at him.

"That means that we're as good as free, don't you?" he said in a whisper.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, that he'll not rest until he helps us to skin out of this scrape."

"Do you suppose he'll turn traitor?" cried Kit.

"No. Never. He'd cut his hand off before he'd help us. And if he wanted to I wouldn't let him."

"Sho!" said Sam, and his chin dropped, and he looked ruefully at his companion.

"You educated fellows puzzle me most all-firedly. He wouldn't help you, and him your brother all the time?"

"That's it."

"Well, blow me if I think it's brotherly," with which frank expression of opinion Sam relapsed into silence.

Ben Langdon delivered the message to his general and was turning away when Morgan halted him.

"Langdon," said he, "I want you to look at one of the prisoners we've captured. I think he's one of the handsomest built men I ever set eyes on."

"Where is he?"

"There."

"Ah!"

Ben gasped for breath.

"You know him?" said Morgan.

"Yes, it's my brother Kit."

"The devil, you say! Then I'll have to order the guards to keep close watch on him, for if he's your brother he's liable to get the upper hand of us and run us all into the Union licks."

Ben laughed at the left-handed compliment thus paid to him, and then called out: "We got something to attend to, Kit, but I'll be back presently to take you by the hand, my brave old brother."

Ben's eyes were glistening with moisture as he turned and hurried away.

Sam just then gulped down something.

"I take it all back," Kit, he said. "He's a fine fellow even if he is a bloody Secesh."

Very impatiently Kit awaited his brother's return.

And yet, as much of his mind as Ben occupied, Kit was not blind to what was passing

about him, and when the hour was nearly expired he whispered to Sam:

"Keep your eye on me, and be ready to follow suit in case I make a break. I foresee that an opportunity may soon come."

"Bully," grunted Sam.

In momentary expectation of the order to mount, the men were already beginning to look after their horses when Ben arrived.

"Come this way, Kit," he called, and the man on guard said nothing, as Kit, closely followed by Sam, edged out of the crowd of captives.

Ben thrust out his hand.

Kit seized it eagerly.

"Ben!"

"Kit!"

"When have you heard from home?"

"Come this way, Kit," he called, and the man on guard said nothing, as Kit, closely followed by Sam, edged out of the crowd of captives.

"And then?"

"You have not been to see the folks since then?"

"No."

"They were well then."

"All of them?"

"Yes, all."

"And mother—God bless her!—does she grieve much?"

"Of course, that must be expected."

"And Belle? She's true blue yet?"

"Yes, heart and soul."

"Bless her little heart! And does she still stick to Harry?"

"Yes; she says she'll marry him after the war is ended."

"And Harry? Is he the same noble fellow he used to be?"

"He is every way worthy of our sister, Kit. He is a grand fellow, and a perfect lion in a fight. But, Kit, I'm awful sorry to see you here in the light of a prisoner."

"Don't grieve. You won't see me thus very long."

"How so?"

"Don't ask too many questions."

Ben grew pale.

"For Heaven's sake, Kit," he exclaimed, "don't be so foolish as to attempt to escape. It is sure death. Promise me—"

The sure was interrupted by the command that swept along the line to mount.

"I'll soon see you again," said Ben, hurriedly, and clasping Kit once more by his hand, he sped away where he had left his horse.

"Prisoners mount!" ordered the guard.

Kit and Sam were the first to get into their saddles.

"Now!"

Kit hissed the word into Sam's ear, just as he vaulted into the saddle.

"Ready," grunted Sam, between his set teeth.

A moment later and a wild howl went up.

As Ben Langdon turned and every particle of color deserted his face at sight of Kit making a dash for liberty!

CHAPTER VII.

A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE

Belle Langdon had gone to the spring to procure some water, as she not infrequently did.

She had no thought of danger, for she had performed that selfsame journey hundreds of times without ever having had cause for alarm.

So, on this day, she looked about her with no more suspicion than she always had, and came aware that she was confronted by a burly rough-looking man, while now protruding from the bushes were the heads of three others.

The pall dropped from her hand as he reached out his hand to grasp her.

As she felt his brawny hand close on her arm, she gave utterance to that piercing scream which alarmed all in the settlement.

"Confound it," growled her captor—"stop that squealin' or I'll throttle ye."

Then, in spite of the brave girl's struggles, he picked her up in his arms, and as she were carried off, he heeded neither a child, he began to descend a rough mountain path.

Her agonized father caught sight of her at a moment when only she and the man who held her were in sight.

"After him!" cried Mr. Langdon. "Surely we ought to be able to handle one man."

Even as he spoke, three other men came in sight.

They were behind the abductor, as if to

cover up the rear and insure his getting safely away with his lovely prisoner.

"Oh! if I had a rifle," moaned Mr. Langdon.

"Here is one."

He turned quickly, and snatched it from the speaker's hands.

Up to his shoulder it quickly went, but soon was lowered.

"I should be likely to hit her, and probably kill her," he groaned. "Follow me—we must rescue her."

Down the mountain path dashed the anguished father, followed by the couple of such as a few half grown boys, who could be of no earthly assistance.

The abducting party soon after disappeared from sight in the thick growth of bushes and young timber that grew on the lower reaches of the mountain.

Mr. Langdon was not long in reaching the point of disappearance, and here all trace was lost.

Earnestly they searched, but could not find trace of or rescue the lost beauty; and when night came on, dark and moonless, Mr. Langdon assented to returning to the settlement.

He was with his wife overcome with grief, and wild with apprehension.

"What can we do?" she wailed.

"I do not know," sadly.

"Must we leave her to her fate?"

"I can see no other way."

"But what may happen here?"

Mr. Langdon bowed his head, and a tear forced itself from his eye.

"She is in the hands of God," he reverently said. "Nothing more can be done to-night, and we must trust our darling to His care. When day comes again then—then we will see what can be done."

A sad night had never closed in on that little settlement than this one when Belle Langdon was thus forcibly carried away.

Where?

By whom?

And for what purpose?

These were the questions that agitated every heart, as the affair was discussed in hushed tones around each fireside.

She had been loved by all—this gentle yet high-spirited girl.

No little child in the settlement but ran gladly to her when they saw her, and many a little one fell asleep that night with eyes as wet, or big tears resting on their faces.

The night wore on until the hour of nine, and the people were all making preparations to go to bed, when attention was arrested by a sentinel's cry.

"Ho! ho!"

What could it mean?

Every head was bent in a listening attitude.

Was somebody freezing, and in need of assistance?

"Ho! ho!"

No; the tone was not that of a person in distress, but seemed rather to be intoned with gladness.

Perhaps somebody's father or brother was returning from the war to pay a visit.

"Ho! ho!"

Mr. Langdon stepped to the door, threw it open, and gazed out into the night.

"Father!"

Ah! he knew that voice.

"Be! my child—"

Light came tripping over the frozen ground, and the next minute the head of the beautiful girl was pillowed on her father's breast.

"Hi! ho!"

"What does it all mean?" shouted somebody.

The voice that had broken the silence with that "Ho! ho!" answered:

"Belle Langdon has been rescued, and is safe in her father's arms."

The cry was caught up and repeated, and many a fervent "Thank God!" was uttered.

"Come in," said Mr. Langdon, after straining his daughter to his heart. "And the noble man who has rescued you—let him too enter, that he may receive a father's blessing."

The owner of Belle Langdon followed the minister inside—Belle, as soon as released from her father's arms, having rushed in to fling herself in those of her mother.

You.

Mr. Langdon's tone was incredulous.

"You?" he repeated.

Surprise was depicted on his face.

Yes. Why, is it anything funny? Do you think that only persons can fight?"

The speaker was none other than Buck Toole.

"Forgive me," said Mr. Langdon, gently. "I have always misjudged you. I have al-

ways believed you to be a wicked man, but I humbly crave your pardon."

"You can't always tell a diamond in the rough," was the reply. "I may do some queer things at times, but my heart is in the right place."

"To-night's action convinces me of that fact," said Mr. Langdon, heartily. "And now tell me how you came to rescue my darling."

"Oh! there's not much to tell," in an off-hand way. "I run across four fellows a fakin' of Miss Belle with 'em, and quicker'n lightning I had out my pops and was blazin' away at 'em. They dropped her like a hot potato, and out sticks like the cowardly cusses they are. Then I just about face and brought Miss Belle home. It was slow work coming up the mountain in the dark, which accounts for my gettin' here so late."

"Heaven bless you for this good act," said the parson, and inwardly Buck exclaimed: "I've scored a bull's-eye sure."

"You must stay all night," added Mr. Langdon.

"Yes, don't care if I do. It's a long way down the mountain on a night as dark and cold as this. A blanket here on the floor will do splendidly."

In the privacy of their "leeping room" Buck told substantially the same story of her rescue as that told by Buck Toole.

Soon after daylight, the next morning, everybody began to crowd to the house of the Langdons to express their joy over Belle's escape.

From the oldest, to those who could just toddle, they came to say how glad they were that she had returned home safely, the older ones of course anxious to satisfy their curiosity as to how it had been brought about.

Buck Toole instantly was exalted into a hero, and on all sides were his praises sung.

He bore the compliments as to his bravery with as much modesty as he could muster, and shortly after noon took himself away.

At parting, he offered his hand to Belle, and she timidly accepted it.

Mrs. Langdon shook his hand warmly, as did her husband, who said:

"Buck, when I buck you a favor, come to me. I will I could reward you as you deserve for rescuing my child from an unknown fate, but that would be impossible."

"I know it," with an assumption of gloominess. "There's only one way in which I could be paid."

"And that? If there is a way, mention it."

"I'm dispirited in love with the girl," blurted out Buck, with an appearance of blunt honesty that quite deceived Mr. Langdon, and then he strode away.

"We planted the seed," chuckled Buck, as he descended the mountain. "Now let it grow. That was a clever idea—that abduction and rescue business. It's worked like a charm. But suppose it don't work after all?"

His brow clouded.

He paused and clinched his hands.

"Curse it," he hissed, if then there brothers of hers only get killed, I'll lead force her into it whether she wanted to or not. But I'll never do to try any such game as that while they're alive—for they're both fire-eaters."

For the foregoing, the reader will gather the truth—that the villains who had abducted Belle, were acting under Buck's instructions, and that the rescue was a clever scheme.

His reason for going to all this trouble was simply that he feared to resort to open violence to gain his foul ends while either Kit or Ben were alive to mete out vengeance on his behalf.

If he could bring indirect influences and forces to bear—if he could obtain Mr. Langdon's consent, however reluctant it might be, he would have attained his ends in the same and without taking upon himself the risk of incurring the active enmity of Kit and Ben.

He was made of too coarse a material himself to have any really fine feelings, and he believed that while Belle did not now care for him, she would do so once they were married.

He let a weak pass by, and then again visited the mountain.

Belle saw him coming, and with a shudder, retreated into the house.

She did not like the man who had feared him, even though he had, to all appearances, rescued her from a fate perhaps worse than death.

She feared him still more, after hearing

from her father's lips the words Buck Toole had used at parting with him.

Straight to the parson's house he came and asked for Belle.

She could not refuse to see him after having been so greatly indebted to him, and emerged from her own room.

He came right to the point.

"Miss Belle," he said, "I have come here to ask you to marry me."

Then he looked questioningly at her, his face lighted with eagerness.

"Impossible!" she gasped.

"Why not?"

"Because—I don't love you."

"But you would after awhile."

She shook her head.

"I am sure!" she said.

Buck gazed at her lips.

"I'm sorry that you can't marry me off-hand, whether you want to or not," he said.

"Because it is necessary that you should become my wife within this very hour!"

CHAPTER VIII.

UP AND AWAY.

Kit Langdon's keen eyes, as we have said, had not been idle while he was awaiting Belle's coming.

Carefully they had scrutinized the surroundings, and he had reached the belief that it would be possible to escape during the bustle of remounting.

At the east side of the road was a willow hedge, with a gap in it here and there.

Beyond this hedge was an open field of two hundred yards in breadth, and then came a piece of timber.

Once through this hedge, Kit clearly saw that it would be difficult to bring them down with bullets.

The hedge would prevent the rebels shooting at all, or else deflect the bullets.

When that about went up which caused Ben Langdon to look around, to see his brother making a dash for liberty, it was toward this willow hedge that Kit was heading.

Morgan, too, saw the dash.

"The devil!" he exclaimed; "and I actually warned the guards about that very fellow."

He knew at a glance that it was Kit.

There was no mistaking that tall athletic figure.

"Now!"

Once again this little word fell from Kit's lips.

This time it was addressed to his horse.

As he spoke, he touched the animal lightly with the spurs, lifted him, and away they went crashing through an opening in the willows not sufficiently large to let them pass without bending and breaking many a twig.

"Now!" cried Sam.

Then his horse reared outwards and upwards, and at Kit's heels he went through the hedge and—

A heavy discharge, of a dozen rifles shot off at once, rang in Sam's ears, and he could plainly hear the whizz of the bullets he had so narrowly escaped.

It was a daring feat.

From the lips of more than one fell an admiring exclamation.

Kit had calculated well.

The hedge prevented indiscriminate shooting at least, and indeed there were few prepared to shoot at such a moment. Nearly every man there thought of the remaining ones, and almost fearing a stampede, closed around them.

Morgan and a few others, however, stood in a position where a complete command could be held, and the open space which the bold fellows must cross.

Not one had presence of mind sufficient to try and shoot the escaping captives.

Morgan was the only man among them who retained the use of his faculties to their full extent.

He matched a rifle from the hands of the man nearest him.

To be his guide on it flew.

Morgan was an unerring marksman, and when Ben saw him draw a bead, he groaned deeply.

Watching his breath, he sprang forward with uplifted hand, as if he would dash aside the rifle held by his chief.

He suddenly paused.

His hand dropped.

With a finger on the trigger, Morgan looked questioningly at Ben.

"Shoot!" groaned Ben.

When the agonized fellow had seen Kit's life threatened, he had sprung forward to

dash aside the weapon that threatened his brother!

His hand had dropped to his side when he remembered that Kit was an enemy and an escaping prisoner.

So, with a groan, Morgan asked him the mute question, Ben groaned:

"Shoot!"

Morgan's keen eyes leaped along the barrel and alighted the flying horseman, and Ben shuddered, and unconsciously murmured:

"Poor mother!"

The finger was not drawn.

Instead, the rifle was dropped into the hollow of Morgan's arm.

"Blame me if I can do it, Ben," he said.

"He's too grand a fellow to be made crow's meat of just now."

Thou to our officer:

"Stop all pursuit. We can't afford to waste the time it would consume to overtake them, for they have now plunged into the woods; but keep a sharper lookout on the others."

In the edge of the woods Kit came to a halt.

Sam, as his impetuous nature suggested, wished to plunge on through the woods, but Kit was not that kind.

He wanted to see what steps the enemy would take, so as to try and offset each movement.

Great was his surprise at finding that pursuit was not given.

"That's just," he muttered.

"So 'tis," grunted Sam.

"They're going to move on."

"Yes; and they seem to be in a hurry."

"It may be that they have received word that they are pursued, and are in haste to get away."

"Like as not. Hope so."

Kit was very wary.

He could not be sure that this same trick was not being resorted to for the purpose of capturing him without any chase.

As near as he could judge the whole body of cavalry moved on, but he could not be positive that there were not a score or more of the raiders lying in wait just beyond the willow hedge which had stood to him in the light of a savior.

But he was not going to fall into so simple a trap as this if there were such a one.

Of course, as the reader knows, there was no necessity for this precaution, but it is the keenness of mind that looks out for such traps that makes a good soldier and scout.

Sam went nearly half a mile inside the woods, and then emerging, crept toward the road in the concealment afforded by a cross-hedge.

On reaching the road, he found it absolutely clear.

This he signalled to Kit, who at once came forward with the horses.

Soon they were cantering back over the road which they had crossed only a short time before in the character of prisoners.

Before very long they encountered a squad of Union cavalry, in hot pursuit of Morgan.

A halt of a minute was made.

Kit told the commanding officer all he knew, and in turn received for himself and Sam a brace of revolvers each.

On being taken prisoner Kit had not been searched, and the message given him to deliver was still safe in his hiding-place.

So, now that the rebels were armed, he determined to go in and deliver the message as if nothing had happened, instead of returning into the lines.

Chances were across their path the same rank rebel woman who had laughed so scornfully just before they were captured.

She stared blankly at them.

In her surprise her mouth opened as well as her eyes.

"I—I thought—"

She stammered out these words, and then paused, unable to say more.

"You told me," Morgan had gabbled up. "Well, so he did," said Kit.

"Then how in the world—"

"Did we get here, eh? You wouldn't believe it, I suppose, if I told you that the tables had been turned and Morgan had gabbled up."

"No, I wouldn't tell you," she snapped.

"Then I won't tell you so," said Kit. "Get up!" this last to the horse, and away he and Sam again hurried.

When out of hearing both gave vent to a hearty laugh.

"She believes dead sure that Morgan's been captured," said Sam, with a chuckle.

"Poor dear! She won't sleep soundly to-night—she won't dream pleasant dreams."

And, as a matter of fact, Sam was right,

and the Seesh woman knew no peace of mind until she learned that Morgan had safely reached the rebel lines after making a raid extending completely around the Union army.

Laughing merrily over the woman's evident discomposure of mind, and making light of their really exciting experience in being captured and then making their escape, time slipped by very rapidly and almost ere they knew it, they had arrived at their destination.

Kit delivered the message of which he was the bearer, and was told that another would shortly be given him to take back.

Meanwhile, he was told, they must give their horses a rest, and have some refreshments.

They did not start to return until some time after sundown.

The moon did not rise until after eleven, so it was thought wiser to delay, and ride by moonlight into the lines, than to start late in the afternoon and approach the lines in the darkness.

About eight o'clock they started on the back trail.

They had ridden along at an easy gait for over an hour, when Sam unburdened his mind of an idea that had been occupying it for the last quarter of an hour.

"Kit," he said, "just go easy a minute."

"What's up?"

"What do you think of the road?"

"Just what I thought this morning—which is that it is a blamed poor one."

"I don't mean that."

"What, then, do you mean?"

"That this ain't the same road."

"You're decidedly off, Sam."

"Maybe," drily.

"Well, come, say something more. Why do you think we're on the wrong road?"

"Because things don't look the same to me as they did when we rode to-day—along some other road."

"You think—"

"I know," Sam interrupted.

"You think—"

"I know!"

Kit hit his lips.

He hardly liked to have Sam speak so positively. And yet he had a perfect right to do so, for he was Kit's equal in point of rank.

"Well, we'll go on, anyhow," he said, not wishing to give in until he was convinced.

"All right."

"You needn't go if you don't wish to."

"Are you going?"

"Yes."

"Then so am I."

"But—"

"But you're going wrong all the same," said Sam, bluntly.

"We can't get very far out of the way, anyhow, and some cross-road will lead us back if we are astray. See the north star there!—that shows us that our course has been directed toward the right point of the compass."

Sam shrugged his shoulders by way of reply.

They went more slowly after that, and presently Kit began to admit to himself that Sam was right, and he was wrong.

Having come to a road that turned off at right angles, they rode along this in hopes of striking the right road. But the result was another parallel highway, no object along which struck them as being familiar.

Kit began now to look grave.

They were lost.

There was no discounting this disagreeable fact.

Prudence suggested that they should face about and retrace their course, and spend the remainder of the night at the place where he had delivered the message.

But he did not like to give in beaten, and so they rode on.

The moon would soon rise now, Kit reflected, and by its aid he hoped soon to put himself straight.

When the moon did at last rise, it did not prove of as great assistance as Kit had hoped.

Of course it made objects visible, but it could not make strange objects look familiar, and at last Kit resigned in despair.

Sam, I beg your pardon for doubting your word, and now acknowledge that I'm a blamed luncheon, if you know what that is.

"I do," said Sam.

"And you agree with me?" tartly, for Kit had not expected Sam to take him as being literal.

"Perfectly," was the dry reply, and then

as Kit eyed him, Sam took out a plug of tobacco and a knife.

With the latter he cut from the plug a square of large dimensions, which, after returning the knife and remnants of the plug to his pocket, he held up between his thumb and forefinger.

"See that?"

"Yes."

"How is it for size?"

"Are you getting crazy that you ask such a question?"

"Not at all. I'm in dead earnest. How is that for size?"

"It's larger than I'd want to put in my mouth," answered Kit.

"You know why I cut it so big?"

"No, of course not."

"Well, you know, I s'pose, that I'm very fond of a good chew of plug tobacco?"

"Yes."

"Well, seein' as this is the last I'll ever clap into my mouth I've taken a piece of extra size!"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, seein' as this is the last I'll ever clap into my mouth I've taken a piece of extra size!"

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CHAPTER IX.

A TIMELY ARRIVAL.

Belle Langdon shrank from Buck Toole with terror in her face and eyes.

Perhaps he was drunk?

No; a single glance assured her that he was sober, and knew precisely what he was saying, and she gasped:

"Must marry you within an hour?"

"Yes."

"Must?"

"Yes," again.

"I cannot."

"It is necessary."

"But, why?"

"Because, unless you do, you may all be murdered in cold blood."

"Would you—"

"Oh!" he interrupted, "I wouldn't harm a chicken. I'm surprised, Miss Belle, that you should start to ask me if I intended to murder you all."

"I—I—" faltered the girl.

"Of course, on second thought, you don't think so. But come, Miss Belle, is it yes or no?"

"I do not understand. You say that we all stand in danger of—of—of—"

"Of being slaughtered. That is precisely what I mean."

"And how—"

"How does your marrying me alter the case?"

"Yes."

"It does, considerably. Now—"

At this moment Mr. Langdon crossed the threshold.

"Oh, papa!" cried Belle, "I'm so glad you've come, and she sprang to his side and clung convulsively to his arm."

"What has happened to agitate you so?" he said. "Has—"

and interrupting himself he glanced sternly at Buck Toole.

"He's very well, and in danger of being murdered," said Belle, quickly, with a shudder.

"Can you explain this?" and the parson gazed fixedly at Buck.

"Can you—"

"Then do so."

"Very well. Now, Mr. Langdon, I chanced to get wind an hour or so ago that a party of cutthroat guerrillas intended coming up here to clean out this Union nest, as they call it."

"Well?"

"Well—I ain't time enough to get my men together, so I packs off here to once, afraid that I won't get here in time."

"Well?" again.

"Well, here I am, ahead of that bloody gang."

"And—"

"I want to save you."

"That is your purpose?"

"It is."

"And how is it to be done?"

"By my marrying Miss Belle to-night, before the gang gets here."

"Ah!"

The intersection fell from Belle's bloodless lips.

From a distant point there came to their ears a hoarse shout.

"That's them now," coolly observed Buck.

"See here," said the parson, sternly, "are

you dealing fair or playing a double part?"

"Dealing fair, as I always do. Fair dealing!"

is Buck Toole's motto."

"If you have come to help us defend the place can't you do so as well without—"

"No," interrupted Buck. "I can't save you unless she's my wife."

"Where does the difference come in?"

"Just here. I s'pose you remember the time when your Kit came home?"

"I do."

"Then you know as how nothing 'ud a saved his life if Ben hadn't stepped forward and said:

"You know me to be true to the South. That man is my brother, and you can't touch him."

"Just in the same way I can save you if I'm able to step up and say:

"You know me. Well, this man is my father-in-law, and this woman is my wife, and you can't touch any one here without first spillin' good, loyal Seesh blood."

Having delivered himself of this speech in a very dramatic tone Buck folded his arms and surveyed those before him.

Another yell reached their ears.

Belle covered close to her father's side.

Poor girl!

Brave though she was, the prospect of marrying this rough man terrified her beyond expression.

"If I am able to say them words," added Buck, "or leastways somethin' to the same effect, I know that I can save you. But if I can't, why I can't save you no more'n Ben could have saved Kit, if he hadn't been able to say, 'He's my brother!'"

Still another yell came, as if to emphasize Buck Toole's words.

"And if you can't help us in the way you proposed, say, Mr. Langdon."

"Why, you'd all be murdered, sure as fate. It is too late now to retreat—you can't get away. And you must decide quickly. Either Belle becomes my wife inside of the next ten minutes or else blood will flow like water."

"And you know you can save us?" gasped Belle.

"Yes."

He held out his hand.

She shrank away with a shudder and a low cry of terror.

"Oh, Harry—Harry!" she wailed.

"Quit that," exclaimed Buck. "Will you marry me to save your father's life and those of all the others on the mountain? Or do you mean to refuse, and see them all slain in cold blood?"

It was a cruel question.

Again came a yell, nearer than the preceding one.

"Their blood will be on your head!" cried Buck, excitement in his tone and manner.

"Oh, I can't become your wife!"

"You can't, at least in usual life," he said.

"You needn't live with me if you don't want to."

"You mean that?" eagerly.

"Yes."

"Upon your honor?"

"Yes."

With averted face, for she loathed the man, she stepped forward, her face whiter than driven snow which covered the mountain side.

"Make haste, parson," cried Buck, and he clutched the white hand much as the vulture seizes its prey. "There's no time to lose. Cut her off as soon as you can!"

For a second Mr. Langdon hesitated.

His good sense was all averse to performing so unholy a marriage.

They were entirely defenceless, and it was terrible to think that at these innocent people might be murdered.

But to sacrifice Belle! sacrifice his only daughter!

It was fearful to think of tying her for life to this man.

He could not do it, he thought, and he would not.

Then came another yell, followed by the shrieks of the refugees of the valley.

"Cut it short, parson!"

With a groan, Mr. Langdon said:

"Do you, Buck Toole, take this woman to be your wedded wife?"

"Yes."

"Do you, Belle Langdon, take this man to be your wedded—"

"What's the meaning of all this?"

Buck Toole started in surprise, then gashed his face in rage.

Belle glanced toward the door, from which direction the words had come, then snatched her hand away from Buck Toole, and went staggering toward the door.

Then as he clasped her in his arms her white lips brokenly said:

"Thank God—said!"

Mr. Langdon's back had been toward the door, but turning swiftly, he was in time to see Ben catch Belle to his breast.

"Heaven be praised!" exclaimed the parson. "Your coming is very opportune."

"I should judge so," with a very stern look at Buck. "Explain the meaning of this scene?"

"Ben nearly explained," said Buck, putting a bold face on the matter. "You heard those yells?"

"Yes, and wondered what they meant. Can you explain them?"

"Yes, they are from the throats of a party of guerrillas, who intend to 'clean out' the settlement."

"Oh! they do?" sneered Ben. "That makes it necessary to persecute this poor girl?"

"Do not look that way, Ben?" pleaded Belle. "Indeed—indeed—he meant me no harm. He saved my life not long?"

"Is that so?"

"Yes!"

"Then I will give him a chance to explain this peculiar scene."

Buck Toole briefly stated to Ben what he had said to Belle and her father.

To Ben, the thing looked very fishy, and fixing his piercing eyes on Buck, he slowly said:

"I accept your statement of your motives, for my father's and sister's sake. Otherwise I might be tempted to disbelieve you, and order the men I brought with me to fill you full of bullet holes."

Buck Toole's gaze quailed before the searching eyes of the young man.

"Now," said Ben, releasing his sister, and coming her gently to a sofa, "how are you, my mother?" pressing a kiss on the forehead of Mrs. Langdon, who had been sitting a silent and stupefied spectator of all that had passed.

"I wish to greet you more in my heart's desire, my mother, when I return," he added, and then, turning, motioned Buck to follow him.

Outside the door were three men, who, at a word from Ben, fell in behind him.

Quickly they went to the point where the advancing attacking party would emerge into the valley, if they emerged at all—without any very great doubt.

Again came a hoarse shout.

"Singular that men who are going to make an attack should take so much pains to advertise the fact," remarked Ben.

"It is singular," admitted Buck; and Ben fancied he could hear his teeth chatter.

A minute later, and suddenly:

Crack! crack!

Then a brief pause; and then again:

Crack! crack!

"Hal! hal! I saw the head of one come up behind that rock!" exclaimed Buck. "I'm sure I hit the fellow!"

"Very likely," said Ben, and to himself added: "Two shots twice, with a short interval between. A likely signal! I suppose it means for me to retire."

Perhaps it did, for certainly no more shouting was heard, nor did the expected attack take place.

Buck found shelter with one of the families for the night, and in the morning left the mountain, cursing his luck and gnashing his teeth at the miscarriage of his well laid plan.

For a whole week Ben remained on the mountain, and this visit was referred to in the hasty conversation he had had with Kit, on the day of the latter's capture by Morgan's cavalry, of which, had time permitted, he might have given Kit the details.

Then, the week being expired, Ben bade them all a loving farewell, his last words being ones of caution as regarded Buck Toole.

He is a dangerous man and a thorough-going villain, he said, bluntly: "Do not trust him under any circumstances; and, father, though one of your cloth should especially be averse to shedding blood, if that man should come here, and you see anything suspicious in his actions, do not hesitate to shoot him like a dog. The South can easily afford to spare the aid of such men as he is; in fact, it is the Buck Toole who bring discredit on our noble cause."

Then he went away again.

His earnest advice as to how to act, should Toole come again in the mountains, was not forgotten, and, as the loaded gun was kept where Mr. Langdon could readily place his hand on it.

Belle exercised the greatest caution when she went out, to never be out of sight of somebody.

But days passed and became weeks, and weeks multiplied into months, and still nothing had been seen or heard of Buck Toole.

They began to believe that, as they hoped, they would see no more of him.

Then one day a paper found its way into their hands, containing an account of Fort Donelson, in which the name of Kit Langdon was mentioned.

This news simply whetted the appetites of the two papers, and, after that, once a week, some one of the community ventured to the village some miles distant to get the papers.

The papers brought sorrow to the hearts of the couple of the families, and at last, spread a deep gloom over that of Mr. Langdon.

There was an account of one of Morgan's reckless raids, and appended to it was a list of the killed and wounded.

In the list of killed was the name—"Ben Langdon."

There was one person who felt as great a loss, seeing that name in the list of dead as the Langdons' felt sorrow.

Needless to say it was Buck Toole.

He had during all this time been nursing his desire to make Belle Langdon his wife.

Strategy had failed, and he had been compelled to be quietly on his oars. While Ben Langdon lived he dared not employ brute force.

But now!

Less than a week later, Belle Langdon mysteriously disappeared!

CHAPTER X.

A CLEVER RUSE.

For just one minute Kit was ready to declare that his companion had gone crazy.

At the point of starting, he remembered how he had once before been mistaken that night, and checked the words.

"Hidden inside the rebel lines?" he said, echoing Sam's words.

"Yes."

"I don't see how we could do it?"

"We have."

"How do you know?"

"Easy enough. I heard the click of a musket lock a minute ago."

"Where?"

"Speak lower," warned Sam. "The picket men have been asleep and so did not hear us until we'd got fairly past. On the spur of the moment he brought his piece to a full cock. I caught it, but didn't dare draw your attention, 'cause he'd be hearing me. And, not being exactly sure whether we passed him or was a couple of rebel officers ridin' around inside the lines, he's believed it best to take the latter view as the right one, and so did not fire on us or give the alarm."

"I do not see how it's possible for us to have traveled into the rebel lines."

"It's a point on which I can't reply. 'We just executed a flank movement around our own army, and as might be expected, have fetched up just here.'"

Such indeed was the case.

Kit knew that there had been in the saddle much longer than was necessary to reach the Union lines, but had not believed that they had covered as many miles as they actually had done.

Kit was stumped.

The picket certainly would not be so accommodating as to go to sleep again and permit them to pass out as they entered—undisturbed.

Perhaps Kit Langdon had never in his life been placed in so great a quandary.

"If I'd only been guided by your judgment," he said, resolutely.

"You wasn't; so that's settled," was the laconic rejoinder.

"I wish I had, however."

"No, of course not. But how are we to extricate ourselves from this dilemma?"

"It needs a wiser head than mine to answer that question."

Kit immediately decided that it needed a wiser head than his also.

Still he could not remain idle, could not permit himself to be made a prisoner in such an enormous matter, without at least making one effort for freedom.

As he sat there in the saddle cudgeling his brain, an idea occurred to him.

The boldness of the scheme, however, took away his breath.

He uttered a little gasp, which led Sam to inquire what had entered his head.

"I've got an idea, Sam; but to work it, requires a coolness and courage that is almost beyond the human."

"What is it?"

"A few low words Kit explained.

"It is bold," assented Sam, and then he laughed softly. "If we only could work the racket," he added, wistfully.

"Can you suggest anything better?"

"No."

"And are you ready to try my plan?"

"I am."

"Then fall in behind as if you were my orderly."

Sam promptly obeyed, and then Kit started his horse forward until he reached an inner picket line.

"Halt!" he was ordered. "Who comes there?"

"Silence, man!" Kit sternly ordered. "Do not speak above a whisper."

"Who comes there?" stubbornly repeated the picket, although in a low tone.

"A diet of bread and water for a few days may so improve your eyesight that you will know an officer when you see one," Kit threateningly rejoined.

The man was overawed by this assumption of authority.

"I didn't know—"

He began in an apologetic tone.

Kit cut him short.

"Never mind arguing the matter," he tartly said. "Now answer my questions. Where is the corporal of the guard?"

"In the tent yonder."

"Go arouse him, and tell him to wake his captain and his men here!"

The sentry was doubtful what to do.

The penalty of leaving a post until officially relieved was something to be dreaded. And yet he hardly liked to take it upon himself to refuse to obey one who spoke so authoritatively.

Concluding to obey, he took his departure.

"So far good!" said Kit, in a low tone.

"Now if the moon will only remain behind those friendly banks of fleece, I believe the scheme can be carried through successfully."

The sentry was much relieved at finding the two horsemen where he had left them.

"You obeyed my orders?"

"I did, sir."

"Did you tell the corporal to make haste?"

"Yes, sir."

It seemed strange to Kit and Sam, but it was really a space of time less than five minutes when the corporal came up with his captain.

"Captain," said Kit, speaking in a cautious tone, which at once caused that person to form an idea of something important being in the wind.

"Here, sir," he replied.

The captain stepped forward and saluted as he spoke.

"Come this way—I wish to speak for your ear alone."

The rebel captain advanced.

In the darkness he could not tell whether the suits worn by Kit and Sam were blue, brown or green.

"What is it, sir?"

"Information has just been received that the enemy is advancing expecting to take us by surprise. Orders are that the picket line shall be quietly—absolutely in silence—drawn back so as to prevent any alarm."

"Ah! I see—"

"Yes—yes—of course. They will naturally expect to first come upon a picket line, and will not believe themselves near us until they encounter one. They won't meet one, and the first they know of our nearness will be when they find themselves confronted by a line of battle."

"I understand, sir."

"Be cautious and be silent!"

"Yes, sir."

"Instruct the corporal at once."

"I will do so, sir."

"And furthermore, tell the corporal to instruct the sentries to hold their fire absolutely. I am going to ride down the line and do not want to be shot down by friends."

"Very good."

The captain was completely fooled.

Properly he should not have accepted any instructions from any one, save a known superior.

There was something complimentary about his being sent for by one, whose tone implied high rank, and by him intrusted with even the reasons for making certain moves. It flattered him, and he had not thought of the extent that he never stopped to think of anything else than that he was considered a very important personage.

The moon still remained behind the fleecy banks, and Kit rode leisurely away for a space, and then came back.

In the meantime the corporal had been at work.

The outer line of pickets were even then spotted back, presently passing inside of the spot where Kit and Sam then were.

The moon still remained hidden, but the dense clouds were moving swiftly, and Kit knew that in a couple of minutes the face of the orb of night would be unobscured.

When that occurred, it was necessary that he and Sam should be far enough away so that their uniforms would not betray the men.

It was a ticklish position.

The whole operation was of an exceedingly delicate character, and the least circumstance might open everything to discovery.

When they found themselves outside the picket line, from the fact that the pickets had retreated inside of their position, Kit drew a deep sigh of relief.

So far, everything had worked to perfection.

If it came to the worst they at least had a straight road before them and could make a good race for it.

In fact, if they escaped injury or slaughter from the first fire, the chances would be in favor of their getting safely away.

"Now then, Sam, follow me, and be very careful," Kit said in a low tone. "Try not to make any move that would arouse suspicion."

"I savey," returned Sam, cool as a cucumber.

Kit started his horse forward, directly away from the rebel lines!

He had told the captain that he was going to ride along the lines, while now he was going at exactly right angles with the course mentioned.

It was a circumstance which, if noticed, would be apt to arouse suspicion.

Both of the hardy men were aware of this fact, and both held their breath, and strained their ears, waiting for the first sound indicating a suspicion as to their motives.

The moon sailed out from behind the white clouds, and they knew that now they could be seen moving away!

It was a trying moment.

Both felt like digging spurs into the flanks of their horses and riding for all they were worth.

They remembered that the horses had already traveled far and were considerably fatigued, and beside they were not yet out of pistol shot, although distant far enough that the color of their uniforms could not be distinguished.

He controlled the desire to make a dash, and Sam copied his example faithfully.

With bated breath they moved slowly away from the dangerous vicinity, and neither breathed easy until far beyond rifle shot.

They began to feel confidence in themselves, but continued to proceed at the same slow pace, until the rebels were so far in the rear that they were surely unable to hear the tramp of the feet of the horses whose daring men bestrode.

Sam signaled their safety by a hearty burst of laughter.

"That beats the Dutch," he gurgled out. "If it don't, then I'm a sucker!"

"Luck has stood by us twice to-day," said Kit, gratefully. "We have got out of two tight boxes."

"You tell the solid truth, thar?" cried Sam. "I say, Kit, if a fellow was to tell about this affair, do you think anybody would believe him?"

"Hardly."

"I wouldn't if I was the other feller."

Urging their horses along now at a more rapid gait, they were before long challenged by the dawn.

Going through the usual military form, they at last passed within the lines.

Their first care was to find what their own division, and to get what they picked their horses, and then turned in to get what little rest was possible before the roll-call.

As for the rebel captain, he kept making preparations all night long, wondering meanwhile how it was that so little activity was manifested elsewhere along the line.

It was not until after daybreak that it began to dawn upon his mind that he had been fooled, although by whom, and for what purpose, he had no idea.

To him it looked like a practical joke, but he could never discover any clew to the joker.

If that rebel captain is still living, and chances to read these lines, he will for the first time become aware who it was and for what purpose he was called from his quarters.

The corporal—ditto.

This latter person doubtless has many an hour puzzled his brains over the mysterious officer with his mysterious orders.

After this adventure came a period of inactivity in Kit's army life.

He had been forced to employ the idle time in paying a visit to the mountain home where his kindred had taken refuge; but it was a time when furloughs were very rarely granted, for it was certain that before very long a great battle was to be fought, in which every man would be needed.

After the fall of Fort Donelson, the rebels had slowly made their way toward Corinth, from all directions.

At this place millions of great supplies of stores and ammunition were concentrated, as well as the rebel forces under Generals Van Dorn and Price. Generals Beauregard and Johnston were at Corinth, personally making superhuman exertions to fortify the place in such a manner as to bid defiance to the enemy who had wrested Fort Donelson from them, there scoring a victory that went far toward wiping out the disgrace of previous defeats.

Meanwhile, U. S. Grant, in command of the Union army, was slowly but steadily advancing in the direction of Corinth, the great center of the rebel forces, being a great railroad centre of the South, was of the utmost importance to the Confederates.

The first day of April of that year found a peculiar look on the face of every man in the opposing armies.

Every man knew that the clash would soon come, and that when it did come it would be something fearful.

As the clouds were in sympathy with the lowering brow of war the skies were overcast with heavy sullen-looking clouds.

After much threatening these opened and let their suspended floods come down, and the roads, already bad, became almost impassable.

But this daunted not General Johnston—a gallant man and a brave one, although a rebel—and his army moved on to Corinth, and struggled on through the mud and rain and mire, struggled bravely on, Johnston to pit his daring bravery against the bull-dog grit of Grant, in a death struggle for victory! The day of April 4, 1862, Saturday being the day of the fight, General Johnston and his men arrived in front of the Union lines some time after the fall of darkness.

The weather had changed.

The sky was now blue and blue, and the myriad stars that spangled the azure dome looked down on that now peaceful scene—peaceful now, but destined soon to have its quiet broken by the rebel yell, the rain, the shout, the whistle of the bullet, the shriek of cannon balls, the groans of men all mangled and torn and dying; to have its bosom stained with the red life-blood of the men—some clad in blue, some clad in gray.

The day dawned at last.

It was the Sabbath.

And it was a Sabbath day too calm and bright and quiet to be desecrated by a wild battle in which thousands of human beings were to meet—eager to shed each other's blood.

And yet it was so desecrated.

The day dawned barely dawned, and some of the Union soldiers were just getting breakfast, while others were yawning and only half dressed, and many of the officers had not yet risen.

The thought of soon being called upon to face bullet and bayonet.

But suddenly the holy calm of that Sabbath morning was rent by a tremendous yell.

While the Unionists are wondering what it means, to their ears come the crack of musketry.

Next flying men are seen—they are the pickets who are slain with their lives! All who do not thus come flying back—and there are many of them—are lying out there by their posts, riddled by rebel bullets, and bleeding from many a gaping wound.

Now out of the cover of the woods come dense lines of men, clad in the rebel gray, and soon they come sweeping on, impressing one with the idea of some irresistible irresistible wave that will sweep everything before it.

"Breakfast is deserted, and a rush is made to form in line of battle."

It is a costly surprise!

While battleless and content officers try to form half clad, and, in some cases, paucity-stricken men into line, the gray tidal-wave comes resistlessly onward, and presently is heard a terrible burst of sound—the dis-

charge of a thousand muskets at once—bringing death to many a poor fellow, and announcing the fearful struggle has begun!

CHAPTER XL

SHILOH.

A battle!

Who can describe it, and its thousand horrible details? Nobody.

Who would wish to describe it? Very few.

It is horrible enough and terrible enough to describe for the weary soldier. We feel all the horrors to be crowded into one mind the brain would surely turn.

And among all the battles of the war there was not one where more of these horrible scenes were so witnessed than on Shiloh's blood-drenched field.

It may not be out of place to say here that by the Confederates, and in their official papers, this battle is alluded to as "the Battle of Pittsburgh Landing."

A word more of explanation.

Generals Johnston and Beauregard had preferred the fight to take place here, and here had preceded the issue, so that Corinth might escape.

Another reason for the precipitate haste with which the Confederates commenced the battle was that Johnston wanted to try conclusions with Grant before certain reinforcements then on the way—under Buell, and coming by easy marches from Nashville—could reach him.

It was a good plan, and indicated his ability as a general.

And so, as we have said, that lovely Sabbath morn was desecrated, its holy calm broken by shriek and moan and anguished prayer, and the air was rent with wailing, and cannon balls shrieked as they flew on their missions of destruction.

The Federals were completely surprised.

That meant almost sure defeat.

The men knew this, and it gave them new courage—or rather lent them new and greater ferocity.

The scene, as the Confederates broke from the cover of the woods, as the pickets came flying back, the rebel yell split the air, as the Federal soldiers dropped frying-pan and coffee-can, as half clad men rushed this way and that, as shouting and cursing officers tried to rally the men and form them into some—what there was to the attack, all this—and much more than this—formed a scene of indescribable confusion.

There were pallid faces there.

As, and plenty of them.

An unexpected attack always breeds a panic, and unless the officers are prompt and energetic, besides having the confidence of their men, the enemy will surely find an easy victory.

Presently came the crash of musketry.

It told of the fray as begun.

Pale cheeks grew paler.

Trembling lips trembled still more.

Quivering lips quivered more rapidly.

And high beating hearts pounded so heavy and swift that they seemed desirous of forcing their way from the breasts which contained them.

Bare boys in blue!

Though the chill of panic was on them—and who could blame them for it?—they did not fly as cowards would have done.

No.

Even when they knew that it would be useless to try—knew that they could not stem the gray tidal wave, they answered the call of their officers, they obeyed instantly.

And out of the confusion lines of battle sprang as if by magic.

And then—and ominous pause for a brief space of time!

Then came the clash; and the terrible slaughter was begun—was begun to last all that day long, to cease only when the sun went down and when it could no longer see to do the bloody work.

The Union lines fell back.

A wild rebel yell went up.

But too soon!

Victory was not so easily purchased.

New lines were forming in the rear.

Brigades were coming up.

The Union battle-line was engaged in the duty of holding the rebels in check until every thing was in readiness.

Now the battle-line was strengthened, and the order came:

"Stand your ground!"

And there in blue stood there like men carved in stone!

Against the newly formed line the Confederates hurried themselves with tremendous force.

Almost like demons the rebels fought. A pulsation ran along the Union line.

It was as if some great heart had given out single throbs.

The shock was terrible. They were wavering beneath it.

Then came the cries of the gallant officers, of new life and spirit and courage into those brave men.

Then one more pulsation—another throb of a mighty heart—and then the Confederates fell back, repulsed with fearful loss.

"Forward!"

The brave boys in blue advanced, and regained every inch of ground over which they had retreated.

Gaining this, they paused to await another terrible onslaught.

It was not long in coming. They were heroes all, were these boys in blue.

Still they were only human. Beneath the violent shock they recoiled, and could not again recover the ground.

And again the gray host came to the attack.

Again and again, with greater violence, deeper confidence, more resistless fury, with each one.

Bitterly did the Federals contest the disputed field.

It was wrenched from them only by inches, but wrested from them it was surely being, steadily, although so slowly.

After twelve hours was the dreadful carnage continued in the front.

In the rear things were no better. Nobly did Sherman's division, stationed on a high mead, meet the terrific onslaught, and men went down like grain before the reaper's scythe.

Once again fate forced Kit Langdon to a conspicuous position.

Officer after officer went down, until at last his company was left without any one to direct their movements.

"Take command, Kit," urged Sam, during a momentary lull.

"I do not like to."

"But it's our only salvation. If somebody does not go to the front, the boys'll break at the next attack, and they'll be branded as cowards which they're not."

Nevertheless, and in spite of Sam's logic, Kit was loth to assume any command.

But it was forced upon him. His colonel came past, saw the confusion incident to being unofficered, and instantly he demanded:

"Where's Kit Langdon?"

"Here, sir," was the reply. Kit stopped forth.

He was so blackened by smoke that he had not been recognized.

"Take command here!"

Such was the brief order. He was not asked to do so, he was ordered peremptorily.

From that time forth, during the remainder of that fearful day, he remained at the head of that little body of faithful men, and led them in the performance of deeds of golden valor.

It was a fight against odds.

From the very moment of the first onset the advantage had been with the Confederates, and slowly and surely they had beaten back the gallant sons of the North.

The condition of the Federal army was every day degrading.

General Johnston could not have chosen a better time to strike before the Federal commander, Buell, arrived with his reinforcements.

On a ridge in the rear of the dread and gory field a square-jawed, stern-faced man paced to and fro.

Gloom was on his brow. It was Grant!

Things were going badly.

It looked as if naught could save the Federal army.

If Buell could only get there in time!

By all means away.

Noon had passed.

The prospect for the Union army steadily grew more and more gloomy.

There was no help for it.

Everything that could be done to stay the gray tidal-wave had been done, and nothing remained save to obstinately oppose the foe until the bitter end.

One o'clock came.

Still the tide of battle was against the Union army, which still was losing ground

at each heroic onslaught, even though it was repulsed.

Two o'clock came.

Still that stern-faced man paced to and fro in silence and gloom.

Three o'clock came.

"General Johnston has been killed!"

This news came.

Yes, the rebel chieftain had fallen on the battle-field, mortally wounded.

Would this knowledge unnerve the Confederates?

Eagerly a sign of weakening was looked for, but none came that was observable.

Though Johnston had fallen, they still had Beauregard, and his name was an inspiration to every heart that beat that day beneath a gray coat.

Four o'clock came.

The Federal camp was in the possession of the enemy!

Five o'clock came.

The brave boys in blue, exhausted, weak, and faint, were now retreating more rapidly. In fragments the companies and regiments fell back, and ascended the ridge we have alluded to.

Every man believed the day lost—as lost it was. Every man also believed that it would not be long before the whole army would be swept from existence.

Did we say *every* man?

Ah! we said.

There was at least one man whose keen eye saw that the victorious Confederates might here be checked in their triumphal progress.

What a few words will sometimes accomplish!

Messengers flew this way and that. Scattered commands were collected, broken brigades, cut-up regiments, separated companies, were massed together for a final stand.

At the foot of the ridge was a narrow, deep and very ravine.

Across this the Confederates would have to go to reach the forlorn hope, formed on the ridge.

It was a dangerous place for the rebels to venture into.

Flushed with victory, they believed once again that they were invincible, and at the word of command they rushed into the ravine.

Now, indeed, came the climax.

Back of the Federals was the river, cutting off further retreat. They must beat back, or they must perish or perish they stood.

Men who had wives, murmured their names!

Men who had children, thought of them, and brushed away a tear!

Into the ravine plunged the victorious rebel army.

Hark!

What was that?

It is a peculiar sound, a sound that, once heard, is never forgotten.

It is the shriek of a shell!

A few seconds and it drops among the Confederates in the ravine even as it bursts.

The whizzing, jagged fragments fly at every conceivable angle, and cut down and suddenly hurl into eternity many an unprepared soldier.

Kit Langdon, standing where he could look down into the ravine, saw a flying fragment of the burst shell cut a man's head from his shoulders.

At the brief second the headless trunk retained its perpendicular, a jet of blood spouting into air, and then with a convulsive tremor, it went prone to the earth, and so quickly was elapsed in the rigors of death.

Kit, shuddering, closed his eyes.

Another shriek!

Another shell came!

Again it claimed its victims when it burst.

That one keen eye that had seized the possibilities of the situation was responsible for this.

Among the brief orders which had left his lips was one to the gunboats in the river, of little use on that bloody day until the present.

Speedily the gunboats had reached positions commanding the ravine, and now, fast and furious, poured shot and shell into the dense ranks of the rebel victors.

The gaps filled up, and the ranks of gray steadily advanced.

Then they came within range of the gathered fragments of the defeated army, standing to shoulder for a last grand effort, shoulder to shoulder, grimaced, grimed with the smoke of hours of battle, stern-eyed—gathered there together to do or die!

Within the rage of such a gathering, the Confederates came, even though shot and shell from the gunboats mowed them down; and then rang out the rolling discharge of musketry.

The forlorn hope had the advantage of position, being above the onward coming foe, and every shot told.

Still the gray host rushed on.

The gunboats in the river fired faster and more furiously.

The determined men on the ridge, perfectly under control, calm through very desperation, poured down on the foe a continuous fire, that, combined with shot and shell, melted away the Confederate ranks as swiftly as a blazing fire consumes a sheet of paper that is thrust into it.

Ye gods! It was grand to see those gray-coated men push onward over the bodies of the dead and the dying, without fear of death, only knowing that a stubborn foe was before them who must be conquered at any cost.

They were heroes all!

Give them that just meed of praise. They deserve it!—God knows.

But they were human; and flesh and blood could not stand without a moment's pause the fearful slaughter—their ranks dwindling swiftly 'neath shot and shell from the river, and the murderous discharges from the deadly artillery and musketry above.

At last they halted.

It was foolhardy—was even worse, was willing suicide—to try to advance.

They fell back.

They retreated from the ravine.

The sullen booming of the artillery became less frequent, and the deadly fusillade of musketry was gradually hushed.

Then the curtain of night descended over the scene.

The first day's battle was finished.

It's fierceness was attested by the heaps of dead that lay strewn all over that contested ground.

The Federals had lost their camp—were beaten—were exhausted.

And the morrow?

What was that to bring forth?

Ah! how many men asked themselves the question, as they laid down on the bare ground to try and snatch a little rest.

CHAPTER XII.

SAM'S DEVOTION.

As that bloody Sabbath day drew to a close and the shadows shibbeted over the landscape, the sky, when caught sight of through a rift in the leaden canopy of the battle's smoke, gave indication of an approaching rain-fall.

At last the rain began to fall in sheets, drenching the earth and the weary soldiers.

Few of the latter knew that the rain was beating down on them.

Exhausted by the excitement and fearful physical exertions of the day, they slept that profound sleep that is almost akin to that of death itself.

Cannon might have thundered above their heads and it would not have aroused them.

They might have been picked up bodily and carried away without being awakened.

The falling rain did not disturb them.

One might perhaps could break that heavy dreamless sleep.

The tap of a drum—touched however lightly—would have brought them to their feet.

The order to "Fall in!" would have awakened the dulled senses of every man.

No other sound could recall them from that lethargic condition which held mind and body under such absolute control.

They knew not that in the darkness—in the rain—wading through new-born rivulets—struggling through the mud of the roads—Buell's army had arrived.

Morning dawned.

The temperature had fallen rapidly during the early hours of the morning, and the rain was changed into sleet and hail.

The grim-faced man who presided over the destinies of the Union army did not wait to be attacked.

It was hardly to be supposed that, after the experience of that Sabbath day, the Union army would force the fighting.

But they did.

Buell's reinforcements were men every one of whom he brave as those who had yesterday fought on the bloody field of Shiloh.

They went to the front—to win!

Enthusiasm was written on every face, and every man was eager to face the foe.

"Onward, then."

And onward they went.

Bravely the host in gray met them, and for awhile the battle raged with inconceivable fury.

Then went up the cry:
"The rebels are giving away!"
And so they were.

But not for long.
They rallied, charged, regained the ground they had lost, and from the ridge the heroes of yesterday's fight swarmed down to lend a helping hand.

The Confederates were checked.
A dashing charge of the boys in blue, and the rebels were forced back further than before.

But still once again they rallied.
Then, with one of their wild yells, they charged—hurled themselves against the Union lines with that tremendous force and recklessness which characterized the fighting on the Confederates.

Once more the boys in blue were pushed back, and left behind them many a brave comrade—some dead, some dying, some wounded.

Many of the latter, in that wild rebel charge, were trampled to death.

Among those who fell just as the retreat began was Kit Langdon.

"Sam was by his side when the rebel bullet struck Kit, but he could not catch him ere he fell.

"Kit—Kit!" he cried.
He dropped his weapon, and knelt beside the gallant young man from Kentucky.

Kit opened his eyes.
He smiled faintly, as he said:

"Go, Sam, do not remain here. You can do me no good and every man is needed now."

"I don't leave you—not if I know myself," grunted Sam.

"But our lives are falling back! The rebels will soon be upon us and our friends!"

"I'm 'cm. That don't bother me."

"And devoted Sam remained there by his wounded comrade's side, while the rebels advanced, went past, and left them in the rear."

"They'll make a prisoner of you now," gasped Kit.

"Praps," said Sam.

"Go, Sam, try to reach our company."

"No, jes you keep quiet. I'm goin' to try and get you out of harm's way."

He stooped and picked up the form of his friend.

Kit was a large man as well as a heavy one, and Sam found his strength taxed to its utmost.

"Let me try to walk," Kit presently said.

Sam placed him tenderly on his feet, and supported him as feebly and very slowly walked away.

Kit was really unfit for the task, but he would not keep Sam there on that dangerous field, where he was liable to be shot at any minute.

They had not gone far, when a deep-voiced oath drew their attention to the person who uttered it.

A wounded rebel was lying very near to where they were.

His face was convulsed with hate, and his eyes glowed red and venomous, as they gazed upon these two men clad in blue.

Sam saw him draw a revolver.

He was going to shoot.

"You measly Yankees!" he hissed.

"You've fixed me, curse you!—and now, blame me, if I don't get square!"

On the other oath, and with his lips as he hastily cocked the revolver, and then he turned it's muzzle on Sam.

Crack!

Sam fell heavily to the ground, dragging Kit down with him.

From the rebel's lips rolled a harsh peal of laughter, and a string of blood-curdling oaths.

"Which every chamber of this pop had a cartridge in it!" he cried, with flaming eyes.

"I'd fud a Yank for all but one, and that—for my self!"

Sam was now rising.

"Ha, ha! you Yankee dog—you think you'll get revenge on me! See how I cheat you—you—"

He placed the muzzle of the weapon to his temple and pulled the trigger.

Crack!

With a half-uttered oath the vile lips ceased to move—became silent in death.

It was necessary to think of the man leaving the world with such venom in his heart, with such foul language on his lips.

Kit could not repress a shudder.

He remembered Sam.

"Are you hurt?"

"His bullet just grazed my arm," was the cool reply. "There wasn't any real need of my taking that trouble, but I didn't know but what the pop was full, and I wanted time to fix him so's he couldn't bite any more."

"You are not deceiving me?"

"How?"

"About how badly you are hurt?"

Nor was he.

Once more he helped Kit to his feet, and they went slowly forward while the cutting sleet and hail pitilessly pelted them.

Presently comes to their ears a roar of voices, swelling louder and louder.

Both face the direction of the ridge.

Thick clouds of smoke, hanging low over the field, make it impossible for them to see much.

Enough is seen to tell them that the wild rebel charge was in vain, that they have been repulsed! And more than that—that they are routed, broken, in confusion, and flying.

"Hurrah!"

Kit cannot help it—the excitement leads beyond the dictates of reason when he utters that shout, for already the first of that flying rabble—once army—are near enough to hear him.

"We must be away from here as quick as possible," remarked Sam.

"In about a minute there'll be a stampede across here which nothing can resist."

He was right.

Kit understood it also.

He took all his strength to his assistance, and hastened as fast as possible from the line of the rebel fight.

On—on they went.

Kit began to lag.

"Only a little further," said Sam, encouragingly.

Kit called his will to his assistance, and struggled on a little further, and then halted.

"I can't go further."

So he weakly gasped.

Sam glanced toward the ridge.

He saw that they were out of the center of the retreating masses.

They were still in the path of a huge and maddened lot of stampeding men.

"If you could only go a couple of hundred yards further," he said.

Kit shook his head.

"It is impossible," he said.

"Try, Kit."

"I can't."

"Remember your mother."

"I do."

"Then for her sake try once again. It is almost absolute death to stay here."

Kit shook his head again.

"I was over then tottering."

"For your father's sake," pleaded Sam.

Kit moaned hollowly.

"For your sister's sake, Kit. Just one more effort."

Kit's face lit up like a smile might have been seen to appear on Kit's ghastly face, and he made a move as if bracing himself to the task.

Then suddenly he recoiled.

A cry of alarm ceased Sam's lips, then an oath and a curse on the rebel whose musket had sped this bullet which had just struck Kit.

Kit had again been hit.

He put up his hands, his eyes closed, he lurched heavily forward.

Sam tried to catch him, and, in fact, did so, but in such a manner as to destroy his own equilibrium, so that he and Kit struck the earth at the same time.

In a minute Sam was on his knees beside Kit, whom he turned on his back that he might see his face.

It was whiter than marble, and set as though moulded in iron; and, as he looked, a deep groan burst from rough Sam Black's lips.

He reached for a musket.

He cocked it, a ferocious gleam in his eyes.

Crouching like a tiger over Kit, he awaited the mad onset.

As the panic-stricken horde came on he silently waived them to the right and to the left with the muzzle of the musket.

Like sheep the terrorized men crowded close in each other's tracks, and once the division had been made they went to either side of Sam and the loved object he was guarding.

Sam crouched there, stony-faced, fierce of expression, and with the threatening weapon divided friends as he had divided his foes.

They should not trample Kit under while he lived!

Such was his determination.

There he remained, unheeding the fierce storm, minding neither the thirst that he felt, or that he was drenched to the skin, and cold and numb.

Once, and once only, did he make any move, and that was when he lifted the coat, noted where the last bullet had struck Kit—in the head—and then dropped the coat again and sobbed:

"Dead—dead—dead!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A WILD CHARGE.

It was as lovely a spring morning as one sees in the course of years.

In the camp of the great rebel raider, Morgan, a bustle was visible.

Preparations were in progress for another of those dashing exploits which had made him so dreaded and had rendered him famous.

Morgan and his officers were quartered in an old-time mansion, the once elegant laws of which had been surrendered willingly as a camping spot for his command.

The owner of the mansion, and the huge plantation surrounding it, was Confederate sympathizer, as were also all the members of his family.

Two sons were in the ranks doing what they could to help the cause, and his high-spirited daughters mourned because their sex kept them out of the field.

With such people it can be easily imagined that Morgan and his men were made welcome, and that everything the place afforded that tended to comfort was placed at the rebel commander's disposal.

Since sunrise Morgan had been up and astir.

He paced the broad piazza restlessly, ever and anon catching up his glass and surveying the road where it wound in the distance over a hill.

His face was lighted with an expression of expectancy, which, as time dragged by, was coupled with another of vexation.

He evidently was in expectation of news.

"Curse the luck!" he growled at last.

"Why don't he come?"

"You are impatient, general."

Morgan turned to his ally.

"Ah! you, Langdon."

"Yes," with a laugh.

"Just up?"

"Yes. I knew there was no use of looking for the messenger before this time, although you have been looking for him for an hour past."

"So I have."

"You are not usually so impatient."

"I know it. The coolest of men get that way sometimes, just as the jolliest and most careless man cannot escape an occasional attack of the blues. For the same reason, perhaps, I am strangely impatient this morning."

"Our hostess has bade me to say that breakfast is ready, and to insist upon your coming in to partake of the same before it has grown cold."

But—

"Pshaw, general! this anxiety is unbecoming to you. It would dispirit your men to see you so. Shake it off."

"I will do so, as was the rejoinder. 'You are a good fellow, Langdon. I wish I had a few thousand like you—and your brother,' he added, after a second's pause."

"Kit is a hero," Ben warmly said. "He is one of our grandest and bravest fellows who ever lived."

"I believe you. But now let us go in."

Morgan entered the house.

Ben paused to give an order as if a messenger came, he was to be brought right in, and then followed his commander.

The afternoon of the day previous a scout had brought in a report which had led to the preparation of the messenger.

It was to the effect that a train was expected to pass over a railroad some miles distant.

If the information was correct, the train was to be met with supplies of all kinds—including medicines—for the Federal army, and was but imperfectly guarded, the trucks running through a section of the country previously conquered by the Federals, and therefore believed to run little or no risk.

As a consequence the train carried only a few soldiers, a mere handful, just enough to make a showing to intimidate rebel sympathizers along the route.

Morgan knew the Confederate army to be greatly in need of the very supplies—particularly the medicines—reported to be on board

the train, and he had instantly made up his mind to capture it if possible.

Other messengers had been dispatched immediately.

One or more of them were now expected to return, and if their reports confirmed that of the previous afternoon, a start was at once to be made.

While at breakfast the expected messenger arrived.

Briefly he stated what he had learned.

He confirmed Morgan in his information.

Final orders were given, and, by the time Morgan had finished his breakfast, they were ready for a start.

Now followed one of those swift, inspiring gallops across country, and in three hours the raiders were in a piece of woods near a small depot.

There Morgan made his way.

The station agent, who was telegraph operator as well, was alone in the depot.

He looked up, nodded condescendingly to the man dressed in a butternut suit and slouch hat, whom he took to be some old farmer, and went on with his work.

"Click—click—click went the instrument under his deft fingers.

"He's been eating Morgan some hard names," remarked the man in the butternut suit.

"You understand it?" queried the operator, looking up in surprise.

"Yes," quietly, "but just go on; I like to hear you give it to Morgan."

"And I like to give it to him," returned the operator. "Reports have been coming from below for the last few minutes that he has been seen evidently aiming toward the railroad. How I would like to see that famous cut-throat for about one minute."

"Would you?"

"That I would. I'd just—"

He halted, his eyes roving toward where a revolver hung, just back of the table on which his instrument was placed.

"What would you do?"

"I'd put a hole in his head as quick as wink. He'd never leave this office alive. I'd give fifty dollars to see him."

"Then hand out your money, for I'm Morgan."

He moved the slouch hat, and the stern eyes, before this half concealed, were fixed on the operator.

The latter wilted instantaneously.

"That will do," said Morgan, grimly. "I see you do not intend putting your threat into execution. Now sit down and telegraph as I dictate, and mark you—I understand every click of the instrument and should you try to play me false, I shall certainly shoot you."

The operator obeyed.

He talked not of other matters.

By Morgan's dictation he stated that it was all hush about Morgan's having been seen; that his information was reliable and to be depended upon.

On these assurances the train proceeded on its way, but was brought to a halt by a danger signal on arriving at this particular station.

From the woods Morgan's men now swarmed.

"Trapped!" gasped the Federal officer in command, and then called on his men to fire.

One volley they poured into the ranks of Morgan, and then were swept from the path of the victors.

In this fire Ben Langdon received a serious wound, which necessitated his going to the hospital after returning.

The train fell a prey to the daring Morgan raiders, and such supplies as could not be taken off were destroyed on the spot.

Ben had nearly convalesced, and in a couple of days more intended leaving the hospital at Corinth, when occurred the terrible battle of Shiloh.

"Your stay here and help care for the wounded," he was told, and so he had remained.

At last Harry Briggs, as he passed, called him by name.

Ben was exceedingly sorry on finding that Harry had lost a hand, and felt a keen sympathy for the poor fellow when he ventured an opinion that, maimed as he now was, Ben would not care to marry him.

"We'll settle that at once!" exclaimed Ben. "We'll go and pay them a visit if I can find the time."

Shiloh was lost to the rebels.

The officers knew that some little time must elapse before any new engagement would take place.

Ben felt that he could honorably leave for long enough to pay a visit to the mountain

home of his parents, and Harry should go with him.

His lightning days were over.

Much as he disliked to entertain the truth, he yet knew that the cause of the Confederacy must rise or fall without his being able further to help or hinder.

It was gall and wormwood to the young man that this was true.

But Ben comforted him. "You'll have your share, old boy," he one day said, his hand thoughtfully resting on Harry's shoulder. "It is His will that you shall do no more."

Now, if he could only get rid of the haunting fear that Belle had ceased to love him—would not now care to marry him!

Her sympathies were with the North—he had fought for the South.

That simple thing he knew had smothered more than one pair of loving hearts.

Would it be his fate?

"She is a noble girl, and will only do what is right. If she decides against me I shall at least know that she acted from noble impulse."

But he did not wish to go directly to her. Ben, however, insisted, and Harry finally reluctantly consented to bear him company.

It was an undertaking not without great peril to Ben to pay the contemplated visit, since it was necessary to cross many miles of country now in possession of his enemies—the Confederates.

They started on foot, since in this way they would attract less attention than on horseback.

The arm that Harry carried in a sling attracted sympathy, and without many questions they were treated kindly all along their route.

When, however, they drew near that section where Ben was personally known, it was deemed prudent to make a wide detour, and finally reach the home of his parents by the usual mountain paths.

Starting early one morning, they hoped to reach the valley before night had fallen.

In this they were doomed to disappointment, and just at sundown they halted at a suitable spot for camping, and built a fire both for comfort and as a protection against possible wild beasts.

The fire was kept up all night long without materially interfering with their rest; and the weary journey they started on their way much refreshed, and their hearts swelling in anticipation of the now not distant meeting.

Along the rugged mountain paths they toiled for nearly an hour, when, as they emerged from a dense growth of bushes, Ben suddenly vented a cry of horror.

"What is the matter?" asked Harry.

"My God, I'm chaining Ben, in a shuddering voice. See there!"

He pointed, and Harry's eyes, flashing in the direction indicated, saw that which froze the blood in his veins.

CHAPTER XIV.

BUCK TOOLE'S VILLAINY.

No sooner had Buck Toole seen the name of Ben Langdon in the list of the killed than he began to form plans for the abduction of Belle.

He had no less regard for Kit's bravery or manhood than he believed that Kit was in the Union army, he had less to fear from him, since Kit would not dare venture into that section of the country where Ben could safely come and go at pleasure.

At least such was the position of affairs at the time, although as a matter of fact it was only a short while later before the case was reversed, that section coming under Federal control.

This was decided beyond question by the battle of Shiloh.

We will not progress ahead of the incidents of our story.

The fall of Fort Donelson had taken place.

This was a bad blow for the Confederacy, and for a little there was fear in many a rebel heart that this was the first blow that set in motion the disintegration of the seceding states.

This fear to some extent haunted Buck, who kept well posted on the movements of affairs in the army.

The reports of the state and strength of the rebel army at Corinth, and the certainty felt by the rebel generals of gaining a decisive victory in a few days, lent new cour-

age to many faint and doubting hearts, and among the latter the heart of Buck Toole.

He had brains enough to foresee that if the Confederates were whipped in the coming struggle he might find himself placed in a serious position if he had in the meanwhile seduced Belle.

He was a craven at heart, and he closely calculated the chances of gaining his ends without risking his rascally neck.

If it had been a fortune he would not carry off from him, he would not have halted a moment in putting his plans into execution.

After all it was only a woman!

But he was in love with Belle, that is, as much as he could fall in love with anybody, and would do almost anything, no matter how dirty and disreputable, to force her into marrying him. If doing so meant any personal risk, his love was of that character, that he wanted nothing to do with her.

He weighed the chances for and against himself as well as he could.

The conclusion reached was, that he could safely put his villainous scheme into execution.

From the fact of having seen and heard nothing of Buck Toole and his guerrilla band for such a length of time, Belle had grown less fearful of meeting him.

Now and then she had wandered beyond the limits of the little valley when out for her daily ramble.

It was a fatal day when she permitted her steps to wander whether there was nobody to see her or not.

Buck Toole's minions were lying in wait.

Their orders were not to show themselves, but to wait until they could seize her unperceived and then bear her silently away.

This was completely by the deuce, could not help but entertain of the young man who bore the name of Langdon—Belle's brother Kit—who, by some fatality might cross his track and punish him promptly for the dastardly deed he contemplated.

Belle was very sad of face on this lovely April afternoon.

She could not help thinking of Ben—dear, brave, true Ben!

"Dead!" she murmured to herself. "Can it be true? It seems so like a dream. If I had seen him die perhaps I could better realize it. I have not seen him since that printed list—I can't realize it, though."

Thus she communed with herself.

Many a woman who reads these lines will comprehend the feelings of the girl that prompted the utterance of these words.

They, too, some of them, saw the names of loved ones in such a list.

Could they believe them dead?

No.

It seemed that they must only be absent—not dead, but absent!

And then, when they would come back—it might be at a very distant day—but the day would come.

Somewhat like this were Belle's feelings as regarded her brother Ben.

And Kit?

Was he well?

They had not heard from him since he went away.

Her name, also, was named in some list of "killed" which they had not seen!

"Poor mother!" murmured Belle. If Kit should also be killed it would crush her—she would die.

She did not observe that she had started down the mountain path, nor did she notice how far she was straying, so occupied was her mind.

Nor did she notice that from the bushes, after she had passed, there emerged four tough, bearded men, who looked after her, then at each other, winked, and then chuckled.

Nor did she notice that she was being followed by them, they refraining from pouncing on her till the last minute, until she should turn to retrace her steps.

Turn around, she did not.

Her eyes lighted on the four men.

Then her face blanched.

Instantly she divined that their presence there meant her no good—indeed, meant harm to her.

"Now then," said one of the men gruffly, producing a revolver, "don't you go to make any fuss, 'cause you've got to."

He pointed, and tapped the revolver significantly with one forefinger.

Terror rendered her speechless.

When they advanced to seize her she would have fallen, but she was rooted to the spot.

After a swallow or two of brandy, he was even able to get upon his feet. In fact, he was apparently not so weak as when Sam had been assisting him from the field, before being struck in the head by that last bullet, which had been a glancing shot, had slashed his scalp and deprived him of consciousness, but done him no greater injury.

"Together they left the bloody battlefield."

The next day Kit applied for leave of absence for a four or five days, Tennessee, and through that section of the country, and the state of feeling being as yet an uncertain thing Kit was advised to go in their company.

A body of cavalry were to start the next morning for a four or five days, Tennessee, and through that section of the country, and the state of feeling being as yet an uncertain thing Kit was advised to go in their company.

"I do not believe I can sit in the saddle through a hard ride," Kit said.

"But the ride will not be a hard one. They are ordered to go slow, take things leisurely, and if they get a chance to pick out some petty bands of guerrillas that have done so much damage."

So Kit and Sam took horses that were provided for them, and started off with the troop of cavalry.

No incident of any moment occurred until they were within five miles of Kit's destination.

Night had closed in a full hour before, and the cavalry commander intended soon to call a halt.

Then some one chanced to observe a redness in the sky.

"It is the reflection of a fire," was the conclusion to which everybody leaped.

It was straight ahead of them, so they urged their tired horses to a swifter gait, not knowing but that they might be of some service.

At last they were near enough to see the flames themselves.

It was, or, at least, the residence of one of the wealthiest men in this section," Kit told the commanding officer. "And he was a staunch Union man."

"Possibly the guerrillas have not fled yet."

Kit nodded, and answered:

"Yes."

Only a minute later, and they could hear the faint echoes of the firing.

Then came to their ears the faint report of firearms.

"There is some devilry afoot!" exclaimed Kit.

"You are right," was the reply, and then the officer led the way at a more rapid pace. Up a gentle acclivity, and pausing at the top, a wale lay before them.

Near its center was the source of the flames.

"It is the house of the man I spoke of," said Kit, quickly.

The building was all in flames now, and beyond reach of its heat, on the sward, thirty odd men were dancing in mad glee—like so many fiends who were feasting their eyes on the destruction they had wrought.

"Forward!"

This was the order, sharply given, and on through the darkness swept the avenging force!

CHAPTER XVI.

A TERRIBLE SITUATION.

Shakespeare says:

"There is a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough hew them as we will."

Although the doctrine taught in these words is rejected by all of our smartest thinkers and reasoners of the present day, save here and there a clergyman, it certainly does seem at times as if there must be a greater or less degree of truth in the idea expressed by the divine William, in some of his most ardent admirers speak of him.

The reader may be wondering what the foregoing has to do with this story.

To be perfectly frank, it has nothing to do with the story at all, and it is a mere pretence to give point, as it were, to what happened to Belle Langdon.

"Death in preference!" she had exclaimed, and, then, to escape the hateful persecutions of Buck Toole had leaped over the cliff—to be dashed to pieces on the rocks below!

Buck Toole thought so.

Hardened wretch as he was, he shuddered convulsively as he saw Belle's form suspended

in air for a half moment, and then go down—down—down!

He reeled where he stood, and but for the fact that he swiftly retreated, might have tottered over the cliff and been himself dashed to pieces.

The sweat stood out upon his forehead in great beads.

He had killed his man, as the saying goes, and was proud of it.

In fact, more than one human being had been hurled from the world by his hand, and he had never felt anything like remorse. But, as he saw that young girl shoot down into the darkness he uttered a groan, and trembled like an aspen.

It did not occur to him that she should die.

Selfish and brutal and heartless as he was, could he have recalled Belle now he would have foregone his own desires to see her safe in last long rest.

But that could not be.

She was gone.

In a minute or two, however, the weak-kneed he would have called it—passed, and left him as hard and cold and callous as ever.

He even laughed.

He went to the edge and peered down into the darkness.

He could see nothing.

Darkness, dense, impenetrable darkness, there held undisputed sway.

Then he turned away, believing that Belle Langdon lay at the bottom of the gorge a shapeless mass of flesh and bones.

But did she?

Now note the application of Shakespeare's words.

Perhaps ten feet below the top of the cliff some convulsion of nature had caused the formation of what might be called a pocket; that is, a cavity.

As season succeeded season, and the winds blew, there were conveyed small particles of dust, perhaps a few leaves, and the disintegration of the rock possibly added a little toward filling this pocket.

In the course of many years this pocket became filled with earth by a process of slow accumulation.

Then, at last, a tiny green shoot is seen to appear above the surface, which, as other years go by, continues to grow and expand until, as the result, we have a tree that is nestled and supported by the soil in the pocket.

Now, then, Belle Langdon leaped from the cliff at a point directly above this, and—she alighted in the tree.

That at last she could have had no idea that the tree was there, could have had no conception of the fact that anything could have saved her had she leaped into the gorge and onto another point.

She had leaped as she supposed to death, but after crashing through the top of the tree her clothing fastened on some projecting branches, and there she hung.

Was it a fate?

As we have said Belle was a brave girl at heart, and was not a fool by any means, being a very quick thinker.

If he would never do, it occurred to her, to let Buck know what had happened; and so catching her breath, she remained as still as a mouse during the succeeding few minutes.

Then at last she took her chance to the edge of the cliff and looked down.

She held her breath in suspense.

Much rather would she die than again fall into his power.

A minute, and then she heard the villain withdraw, and she drew a deep breath of relief.

The next minute her heart was caused to leap into her throat.

There was a long-drawn, ripping sound.

Her clothing was tearing.

Would Buck hear the noise?

He seemed not to; but, oh, how painfully anxious was she the next few minutes.

The party had paused to discuss some point. Belle could hear them talking earnestly, although she could not make out a word that was said.

Meanwhile, every few seconds there was a little r-r-r-rip.

At each one she sank a little lower, while for the life of her she dared not reach out to clutch a limb, and so help release the strain on her clothing.

For nearly ten minutes Belle was kept in suspense, and then, to her inexpressible joy, she heard the villain's departure.

When they were almost beyond sound she ventured to reach out to lay hold of a limb.

Strange to say, her hand did not come into contact with one.

Again she reached out.

She then still further extended her hand.

Then she tried the opposite side, but met with no better success.

With the iron of intense agony in her heart she reached in every direction; but every empty space met her grasp, and still, every little while, the stuff of her dress went r-r-rip!

Her position was a singular one.

Caught by the back of her skirts she was hanging in an almost horizontal position, her face turned downward toward the bottom of the gorge.

Just out of reach on either side were other branches of the tree, could she have but reached which she would have been comparatively safe.

In the density of the darkness she could not see these branches, and only knew that nought but empty air rewarded her clutches on every side.

Of course there was a limb behind her back, in other words, above her. It was this one on which the skirts of her dress had caught.

This limb she could lay hold of, however, only by turning herself completely over, which was an impossibility.

Several times she threw her right hand behind her, and then reached upward as far as she could.

This movement, however, seemed to put a particular strain on the dress goods, which, on each occasion, gave most ominously.

So, with a groan Belle desisted from all attempts to reach the limb above her.

She had not felt any great horror at the thought of death by leaping from the cliff, but this hanging here, not knowing at what moment the end might come, was an entirely different thing.

Poor girl!

It was indeed a most horrible position in which to be placed.

She became bathed from head to foot in a cold perspiration, and her poor heart beat wildly within her bosom.

What could she do?

Only hang there until the dress gave away absolutely, or help came.

But would help come? Was it at all probable that anybody would come along this lonely mountain path in time to rescue her?

"Father in Heaven have mercy on me!" was her mental prayer.

Then she sought the most comfortable position that she could, and patiently waited—waited, for what? Only God knew!

Hours—years to her—passed.

Still she hung there.

Had the dress failed to tear; and in the very depth of the despair engendered by her awful situation, she had studied and pondered until the solution was found.

The dress had ripped until the hem was reached and then meeting a double thickness held fast.

Suspension by the hem would have permitted her to hang very head downward had not the skirt been swept upward when passing through the smaller branches at the top of the tree.

As her heavy eyes swept the blackness before her for the thousandth time they encountered an object which had before escaped them.

"This was a tiny spark of light, looking in the darkness through the darkness, like a twinkling star."

It was somebody's camp-fire, she instantly concluded and then she wondered who was beside it.

Could it be Buck Toole, some of his men, or others of the same tribe?

She could not tell, although it was even probable that it was the case that they were evil men.

Should she call for help?

She pondered this question for quite a few minutes, and then, reflecting that daylight was not far off she did not do so.

When daylight came, and she could see, she might be able to form some plan of extricating herself.

Day broke at last.

It is not needed what we have already described to the reader—branches on either hand, just out of reach, another above her, also out of her reach.

Below her, the gorge, to fall to which meant a crushing out of all semblance to humanity.

What, now that daylight had come, could she do?

"I must devise some means," she desperately exclaimed. "Ah! I see a way!" in a joyous tone.

Then, somehow, her eyes were drawn to the very spot where two men stood.

They were considerably below her level,

standing at a spot where a path that crept up over the gorge ran across a flat rock.

They had just at that moment emerged from some bushes, and from the direction in which they came Belle believed that it was their camp-fire which she had seen gleaming through the darkness of the night.

They turned and saw her.

She could see them start, and then one pointed his finger in her direction.

Clearly she saw that they became very excited and about once leaped to the conclusion that as a consequence they were enemies to her.

Now she saw them swiftly climb the rough path, eager to reach her.

"Will escape them," Belle told herself, bravely.

She looked at the limb at the right and then at the one to the left.

She set her teeth and prepared to accomplish a most desperate feat, but one which, if her dress held, promised to be successful.

She threw all her weight to one side in a second, and then threw it in the other direction.

Again and again she repeated this, gradually accelerating her movements, and gaining a pendulum-like motion.

It was hard work to start from a position of perfect inertia, but she accomplished it.

Now each swing back and forth gave her new momentum, and describing a gradually enlarging arc she came nearer and nearer each time to the limb she wished to reach.

Buck and forth—back and forth—back and forth—and as she swung thus, the two men, hidden for some minutes, emerged into sight.

"God of God's sake stay motionless!" shouted one, and Belle knew then that they were friends, not foes.

But now she dared not stop!

The dress was ripping again, would tear through before she ceased swinging to and fro.

No; she must now keep on and try to grasp the limb ere it gave way entirely.

Back and forth—back and forth—back and forth!

"Once!" breathed Belle, "twice! three times!"

She flung out her hands, the dress parted; but she had grasped the limb.

Belle—y—ou—for heaven's sake, how—

There was no time for questions. Can you hang on there one minute?

Yes. Oh! Ben, I'm so glad!

Quickly Ben and Harry found a path by which he could descend to the base of the tree, up which he swiftly went, and by his encouraging and sensible advice and an exertion of his strength, he succeeded in getting her to the trunk of the tree.

Once here, Belle was enough of a country girl to descend without trouble, after which Ben assisted her up to the path.

Ben glanced quickly around at her hand. "You had somebody with you?" she suggestively said.

"Yes," and he looked archly at her.

"What would you say to seeing Harry Briggs—or rather, what there is left of him?"

"Yes, come out of hiding, Harry, wherever you are."

From behind a rock, where he had shrunk as he saw Belle was in safety, came Harry Briggs, looking very thin and pale, and with his left arm in a sling, but Harry Briggs all the same.

"Harry!" she joyfully cried, and then her eyes rested with a strange look of pity and inquiry on the bandaged member.

"I did not want to come, Belle," he said.

"I have lost a hand, and I can't expect you to make a man of me for a husband."

"I didn't want to come, but Ben forced me to."

"You should be ashamed of yourself, Harry Briggs, to think that I could love you, because you had lost a hand," she said, very softly, reproach and tenderness mingling in her tone.

Then she stepped gently to his side, and placed the one hand he had left about her waist.

As he drew her to him, he said, in a husky voice:

"Ben was right."

"Ah! if I only had such a girl to return to!" laughed Ben. "If I had, I'd go back to her, even if I had to roll over and over all the way on account of having no legs to walk on."

He spoke jestingly, but it was to cover the fullness of his heart.

Belle knew it, and glanced affectionately at him.

"But come," said Ben, "I'm anxious to get

home. We tried hard to make it last night; but since Shiloh this is Union ground, and such as I have to move very carefully. Finding we couldn't make it we camped down yonder—and mighty fortunate we did, as it turns out. But come, now, stop that 'highness' can't you? Let's be off. As we go, tell me how you came in that position."

Ben's blood fairly boiled when she explained how she had been carried off by four men acting under the orders of Buck Toole, and kept a close prisoner, and how to escape him she had jumped over the cliff.

"The villain! I'll settle with him for this!"

That was all he said, but there were unspoken volumes behind each word.

"I knew you were not killed!" Belle suddenly exclaimed.

My name in the list of killed," he said.

"Yes."

"I was in hopes you would not see it. I would have spared neither such needless pain to myself, nor did she grieve me."

"Ah! Ben, can you ask such a question?"

"No—no—there is no need. Poor, fond mother! How she does love us all. And father."

He bore it as he does all other troubles—meekly, as becomes one of God's servants. "I am eager to see them again. Oh! that we were there."

It was about ten o'clock when Belle suddenly found herself in the little valley. She was instantly seen, and then up went a wild and joyous shout.

"Is it—is it!" gasped Mrs. Langdon, when she heard it, and then unable to say more she sank in her seat.

"The lost is found—our child has returned," said Mr. Langdon, having stepped to the door and seen Belle coming with hasty strides.

When the greeting was over, she paved the way toward announcing Ben's return, and just as she had told them that he was alive and they had crossed the threshold.

What father grasped his hand, and then released him, that he might go swiftly to his mother, and press kisses on forehead, and cheek, and lip.

So tender—so loving—and yet so daring and so brave a soldier!

There are some who cannot believe that a man can be both.

Yet the fact remains that it is true; as witness these four gallant sons of Mr. Langdon—one fighting for the Union, the other for the Confederacy.

Harry was not forgotten, and was compelled to join the happy family circle.

"If Kit were only here," wishfully said Belle.

Even as she spoke, a shadow darkened the doorway.

CHAPTER XVII.

BUCK TOOLE GETS HIS DESERTS.

The wild and savage men who had formed themselves into a body under the leadership of Buck Toole were divided on the question of what was the best course for them to pursue.

A long and angry discussion had occurred ere they left the house they had occupied as headquarters.

It ended by having Belle Langdon in his hands, Buck advocated flight into the mountains, and, as the reader knows from circumstances described, had his way.

When Belle Langdon leaped from the cliff, to destruction, he believed he no longer desired to go into hiding, and he again opened the question as to their future movements.

Of course, those who had been for retreating southward as rapidly as possible, spoke up at once, and a long and heated discussion followed.

This time Buck threw his weight on the reverse side of the scale, and flight southward was determined upon.

"The enemy won't be so very great a number of cavalry out," said Buck. "And—"

"And what?" asked one near him.

"Who wants to strike a last blow!"

So Buck asked, in a tone loud enough for all to hear.

"I do."

"And I."

The reply was unanimous, but with it some coupled the proviso:

"That is, if it ain't too risky."

"But 's'poken it does?"

"I don't you want to take a little risk for the valley of a thousand apiece?"

"Certainly. If you can show us that much apiece."

"Well, ain't Squire Thorn worth enough to pan out that much?"

"I reckon," said one.

"So do I," from another.

"But it's risky business," said a third.

"Good enough," said Buck, looking straight at the last speaker. "You needn't go—we'll count you out. Any one else want to be out?"

As the reader has seen, Buck Toole was at heart a coward.

Not a few of his men were likewise.

Not a few more were braver men than Buck, and estimated him at his true value. These last felt that if Buck had pluck enough to make the venture, it could not be so very risky, and the ardor which they at once displayed, inspired those of weaker hearts.

Consequently nobody responded, when Buck asked if anybody else wanted to be counted out.

The man whom Buck had applied the process to, at once became the most eager of the lot to go.

Soon they were retracing their steps to the spot where it had been necessary to desert their horses, owing to the rough nature of the course of their flight.

Repossessing themselves of their mounts they were soon dashing across country in the direction of the residence of the unsuspecting man, the staunch adherent of the Union during all those terrible months when to admit Union sympathy, was almost equivalent to having a bullet put through one's head who was so foolish as to venture out after dark.

Holding only a little way from the house two of those fiends in human form stealthily approached to reconnoiter.

The family was gathered on the broad piazza, laughing and gayly chatting.

The sturdy old possessor of the place.

The rebels had been steep toward the South.

All danger from them was now believed to be a thing of the past, and a great relief had come into the hearts of all that family.

Suddenly some one's eyes, more keen than those of the others, discovered a dark shadow creeping over the lawn.

At almost the same moment one of the servants came hurrying but silently from the house.

What is the matter?" was hastily inquired.

"I've done seen a man acrawlin' and acrawlin' up by de kitchen winders," was the reply of the faithful wench.

"Well?" demanded the squire, knowing from the catching of her breath that she had something more to say.

"And I done knowed de man."

"Who is he?"

"Ian Doyce."

"And what of him?"

"He am one of Buck Toole's gang ob bad men."

The squire was on his feet in an instant. The man, he supposed, was regretted, coupled with that of the figure on the lawn, was sufficient for him to guess what was up.

"All of you go into the house," he said.

"But go quickly one by one—and each take a stick behind the door or window that needs securing. When I give the word, make everything fast. In this way we can prevent their taking us by a rush."

They had been attacked before.

Familiar with the danger had developed courage in them all, and to the letter were the squire's orders obeyed.

There may have been some inward trembling, but all outward manifestations of fear were repressed.

Presently a shout rang through the house. It was uttered by the squire.

Slam! Bang!

Every door and window was shut in a twinkling.

Then came the grating of bolts and the dropping of bars.

A howl of rage now went up from the lips of Buck and his rascally gang.

They had expected to make a rush and overpower the inmates of the house in a twinkling. Overcautiousness or overcaution had been Buck's reason for the delay while a reconnaissance was made.

He had just become satisfied that there were no persons around the place save the squire's own family, and had been just on the point of making the assault when windows and doors were so suddenly closed against him.

This was bad.

At least it was bad in Buck's eyes; for now a mere handful could give a plucky resistance.

Squire Thorne had been attacked before,

and had put his house in a state so that it could be defended easily.

"Now follow me!" cried Buck. "Maybe they've left some hole unguarded through which we can get afore its fastened up."

Forward they went, and like famished wolves, rushed around the building trying doors and windows with eagerness in their eyes and fury in their faces.

Every door was barred.

Every window was fastened.

They had been outwitted.

"What's the game now?" inquired one of the men, as they gathered in a sullen group around their leader.

"We must get in," said Buck.

"But how are we to do it? He's got loopholes at the top, I've heard, and knows how to hang a gun."

"He can't shoot us all," said Buck. "For a thousand apiece we all agreed to take some risk."

"There's one thing, Buck!" the other earnestly said.

"What is that?"

"We don't want to stay around this place any longer than we can help. A squad of mounted bluecoats are liable to come along any minute now, and we can't be sure that the men was right, and felt a little uneasy."

"Still he could not give up the anticipated plunder."

"Let's see if I can't frighten the squire," he said. "That's the easiest and quickest way, if it can be done."

"If it can be," returned one of the men, as Buck advanced toward the house.

"Halt!"

This command was given by somebody stationed behind one of the windows, which were all protected by board shutters.

"At once Buck halted."

"Is that you, squire," he asked.

"Yes."

"I suppose you know what we want?"

"What?"

"A slice of your fortune."

"Come and take it, then!"

There was a genuineness in the squire's tone that was not to be mistaken.

Buck bit his lips.

Presently he said:

"Now, see here, squire—you'll find the easiest way the best. You'd better open up to us."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," interrupted Squire Thorn.

"Are you ready to take the consequences?" he was ready to fight until the last gasp, was the determined reply.

"You won't open, then?"

"No."

"Aren't you afraid of fire?"

Buck Toole, of course, did not see it, but Squire Thorn's face grew deathly pale.

"Begone, you hell-hound!" he presently exclaimed, in an indignant tone. "Begone, or I'll put a bullet in your head."

Buck did not wish for such a catastrophe, and at once beat a precipitate retreat.

A period of suspense followed for those within the house.

Meanwhile Buck was discussing the situation with his men.

There were a few who desired to take no risk, but by far the larger majority were for battering down the door and forcing an entrance.

Their decision was made known to Squire Thorn when he saw them coming on a run across the lawn, a huge log poised and ready to be hurled against the door.

Crack—crack!

Two shots rang out when they were within close range.

One man fell dead and another was seriously wounded.

The log was dropped, and the men swiftly retreated, like the cravens they were, leaving their wounded comrade to take care of himself as best he could.

But the villainous crew were not ready yet to give up the prospect of plunder.

"Strategy must be tried," said Buck, hoarsely. "We must try to force a cellar window. Who will volunteer to steal up to the house for that purpose?"

At last two men volunteered, and went stealthily away in the darkness.

In a safety they gained the shelter of the house.

But every window they could reach was so secure that it could not be forced without making so much noise as to draw the inmates to the spot.

It was caused by the death of one of their number, afraid to make an open attack for fear of being shot, and unable to gain ad-

mittance in any other way, they determined on revenge!

It was a base and cowardly thing to do. But no spark of honor animated the breasts of either; it was not a question of whether they could but whether they could.

That they could they were soon satisfied.

Light inflammable materials were close at hand, and soon a great pile had been placed against the building.

When all was ready a match was applied, and when they saw that the wood had ignited they began a swift retreat.

Crack!

Squire Thorn had been hastily called by his daughter, who had caught sight of the glow.

He had reached that side of the house in time to see the dar' figures flying across the lawn.

In an instant his rifle had leaped to the porthole in a wooden shutter; and, aiming quickly, he pulled the trigger.

One of the dastards expiated his belish work with his life.

He flung up his arms, and fell forward heavily on his face.

It was dead before he struck the ground. A maddened howl burst from the lips of the guerrillas, and there was a forward impulse as if they would have rushed forth to avenge the second fallen comrade.

But a cowardly prudence restrained them, and they hung back, hugging to their hearts the glorious vengeance of which the fire was to be the instrument.

It was a terrible juncture for the inmates of the burning building.

For a short space they fought the flames as well as they were able.

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For a short space they fought the flames as well as they were able.

way some may escape. Wait until I give the word. Get ready—"

The word "now" was trembling on his lips, but did not cross them.

"Hark!"

So he suddenly said, in a husled voice. What did he hear?

It was the tramp of horses' feet, swiftly rushing in the direction of the house.

Then he heard a wild, indignant cry. This was followed by a howl of fear and consternation.

"Thank God!" brokenly murmured the squire. "Help has arrived."

So it had.

When they rushed from the burning building they were not met by a shower of deadly bullets.

The men who would have fired them were now wildly flying toward their horses, flying while they panted for breath, while their faces grew paler than those of the victims of their fiendish scheme when death by the flames stared them in the face.

On, like a whirlwind came the Union cavalry.

Kit Langdon—clear-headed as ever—noted the direction in which the men were flying.

"They have concealed their horses in that bit of woods," he said, briefly. "They must be cut off from them or surrounded."

"A good idea," was the response.

"A sharp order was given."

Promptly it was obeyed, and as willingly as men ever obeyed an order.

The men who were boiling within them, indignation was written in every face.

Deep into the flanks of their horses the spurs were dug.

The noble animals responded by a last wild but swift speed, and in less time than it takes to tell it, the guerrillas were surrounded.

Now cowardice seemed to disappear. In the desperation, Buck Toole and his men fought like very fiends.

On every hand was heard the sharp crack of revolvers, hoarse cries of anger, moans of anguish, with many a death cry heavy with denunciation, some man had fallen from his saddle, never to enter it again.

At last it was over.

The last shot had been fired.

The guerrillas were all either dead or prisoners.

Among the latter was Buck Toole.

He had escaped unscathed.

Suddenly and defiantly he looked upon his captors.

Kit Langdon recognized him as the leader, and told the commanding officer who he was.

"Bring a rope!" said the officer.

Buck winced.

Still he managed to play a bluff game until the rope was brought and he saw a noose reared in his face.

Then his seeming courage fled.

His face became ashen—his knees trembled—his teeth shattered.

"You're not going to hang me?" he groined.

"Just exactly what we are going to do."

"It is murder," he shrieked.

"Yes, so it is."

"Murder is cold blood."

"Just about as cold as the blood in your veins when you set fire to yonder mansion, and riddled its inmates with bullets when they fled."

Down on his knees went the redheaded wretch and begged and pleaded for mercy.

"Only spare my life," he wailed. "I don't care what else you do with me—only spare my life."

Nobody heard his prayers, and he obtained no response.

Calmly and coolly the preparations were made, and when they were completed he was unceremoniously dragged to his feet and the noose slipped over his head, and the knot adjusted under his ear.

"Mercy—mercy!" he howled.

Absolutely unaided and craven terror had taken possession of him.

"Can't you die like a man?" contemptuously said Sam Buck, and in his disgust at such absolute cowardice, started to apply his boot to Buck, but desisted on reflecting that it would be unmanly on his part.

"Now!"

The word was given.

The rope had already been flung over the branch of a tree, and as the word came strong and willing hands hoisted Buck Toole clear of the earth, which he had so long polluted with his presence.

Leaving a guard to watch and see that Buck was not cut down, the officer, Kit and others, hurried on to see if any fragment of value

could be saved from the burning mansion. Said to say they could not. At that spot they remained all night, and in the morning Kit and Sam bade the cavalry commander adieu, and a start was made for the little valley up in the mountains. Kit was eager to get home, and as the saying goes, did not allow "the grass to grow under his feet."

In due season, he entered the valley, and shortly afterward stood on the threshold of the little cottage of his father.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE REUNION.

"KIT!"

It was Belle who first saw him standing on the threshold. She bounded to her feet. Her face flushed with joy.

She was the first to reach him as he stepped through the doorway and flinging her arms around his neck, she gave him a rousing hug.

He kissed her fondly, and then crossed directly to where his mother sat; and, as Ben had done, testified to the tender love which he bore for her.

Then he grasped his father's hand. He then exclaimed: "Harry Briggs, this is a surprise indeed, but even more of a pleasure than a surprise."

As he spoke, he shook Harry warmly by the hand.

"Last, but not least, Ben," he said, as he turned to his brother.

"Brave Kit," exclaimed Ben, looking with pride at his brother. "Your paleness of face indicates that you have been wounded."

"I have been."

"Where?"

"At Shiloh."

"I was there as well," said Harry, with a wan smile, as Kit glanced toward him, and as he spoke he nodded toward the arm in the sling.

An expression of pity leaped into Kit's face.

"Is it bad Harry?" he gently asked.

"A hand."

"Come?"

"Yes, gone."

Then suddenly Kit remembered that he had for the time being forgotten one who was waiting outside of the door.

He went to the doorway and called:

"Sam—Sam Black, I want you."

Sam came shambling from around the corner of the house with a suspiciously moist look in his eyes.

He had obtained a glimpse of that home welcome, and for the first time in his life he knew what it was to have nobody who is bound to you by the ties of affectionate relationship.

Kit took Sam by the arms and brought him in.

"Sam," he said, "this is my father."

"How do you do, sir? A minister, sir? Can't understand how you could have such a lion-fighter for a son."

"Sam—my mother," Kit went on, a smile playing about his lips.

"How do you do, ma'am? A real lady, I'm sure, and I love you 'cause you're Kit's mother."

"Sam—my sister, Belle."

"How do you do, miss? May be you wouldn't mind shaking hands with me, for though you're so much better than I am, you ain't so old."

Belle gave him her hand freely.

"And this, Sam, is Mr. Harry Briggs, a dear friend, who lost his left hand at Shiloh."

"How do you do, sir? Lost a hand, eh? First day? Yes. Well, now, I suppose you were up there on the ridge with us. Didn't we just give them Seeces the devil, hey?"

speaking very eagerly; and then, remembering he was in the presence of ladies, he mumbled: "Beggin' pardon for sayin' it, but we did give 'em the devil, and no mistake."

"But, Sam, he wasn't on the ridge," said Kit.

"Where was he, then?"

"In the ravine."

"How'd he come there?"

"He went there with his regiment."

"Why, you don't mean—"

"Yes, I do mean that he was fighting on the other side."

"Humph!" grunted Sam, who had shook Harry warmly by the hand. "I'm glad I shook hands with you afore I knewed it."

"And this, Sam, is my brother."

"Another Seeces?"

"Yes," said Ben. He put out his hand. Sam gazed stolidly at it for fully half a minute, and then he met it with his own, saying:

"You're Kit's brother."

"Now that I have introduced you to these people, Sam, I must introduce them to you. Mother—father—Belle—Harry—Ben, this is Sam Black—honest, faithful, devoted Sam Black, who never turns his back on the enemy while there is a cartridge in his possession."

"Furthermore, to him I owe my life. The second day at Shiloh settled me. I was unconscious on the field, and must have been trampled to death had not Sam here—"

"Go easy, Kit, go easy," interrupted Sam, in a nervous tone.

"Had not Sam here remained by me with musket in hand. As you all love me, you must all love him."

Mr. and Mrs. Langdon began to thank him, but Sam held up his hands and piteously exclaimed:

"Don't!"

Belle looked shyly at him for a moment, and then, with a naturally sympathetic nature showed itself.

She went softly up to Sam, and as she put up her lips to be kissed, she said:

"For Kit's sake, I will love you, Mr. Black."

"No—no! not Mr. Black; just plain Sam," he said, and then, after a doubtful look and a moment's hesitation, he bent and kissed her.

To Belle's surprise he did not stop here. He caught her up and seated her on his left arm, and looking fondly up at her on his elevated perch, waved his right hand and shouted:

"Hoory—hoory!"

"When he finally let her down he anxiously asked:

"How old are you?"

"Just eighteen."

"Eighteen?" he repeated. "Is that old enough to get married?"

"Yes," she answered, blushing scarlet.

"Well, now, said he, you just act here, little lady! Now, I ain't much on good looks, I'm forty if I'm a day, and I've got lots of gray hairs, but I've got a heart that's as young as can be, and it's chock full of Kit and you."

Now then, if you don't find exactly the kind of a fellow you like, and feel as if you wanted a husband, why just say the word, and hang me if I won't run the risk of being hitched to a woman!"

Never in all his life was Sam more earnest than in making this speech.

They all saw that it came from his heart, and tried their best not to laugh. Nor did they, until he added, a little anxiously:

"Of course I'd want all hands to be satisfied."

Then they could hold in no longer, and the rufflers fairly danced as they laughed.

Sam couldn't understand it.

A hurt expression came into his face at the idea that they were laughing at him.

"Sam," said Kit, as he kindly placed a hand on his shoulder; "we're laughing because you're so late in the day. She's already bargained for."

"Is that so?"

"There was something akin to disappointment in Sam's tone."

"Yes."

"Who's the chap?"

"Mr. Harry Briggs there."

"She's going to marry a Seeceser?"

"Don't like it," grunted Sam. "Bust me if I ain't a mind to run away with the girl, so's he can't marry her."

"He's a square and honest young fellow. Sam," Kit gravely said. "The only fault I can find with him, and I have known him many years, that he differs with me in his opinion of who is right and who wrong in this great struggle."

"Well—may be," said Sam, reluctantly. "I'll take your word, Kit. Be kind to him, Miss Belle, after you're married to him."

"I'll try," laughed Belle.

That evening, when they gathered after supper, Ben asked his father how many able men were in the settlement.

"Four, including myself, at the present time; and not including your son."

"Of whom two, only myself and Sam—are fit for the business in hand."

"Which is?" said Kit.

"To finish the abductor of our little darling here," said Ben.

"A-bducted? How—I have not heard of it?"

Neither had he. There had been so many other things to think about and talk of, that were pleasant and bright, that the matter had not been reverted to after Kit's arrival, all the explanations having preceded that event.

When Kit asked about it, Belle briefly told how she had been twice abducted, and once nearly forced into marrying Buck Toole.

"And to think," she said, with a shudder "I suppose I should have actually become his wife! Ben, but he's not so sudden if he'd dropped from the skies."

"I wanted to tell you all these things, the day we captured you, but you did have time just then, and suddenly, and so suddenly on leaving us, I didn't have an opportunity afterward."

"Kit was too smart for you, now wasn't he?" chuckled Sam.

"Granted," laughed Ben; "and now, Kit, do you know what Morgan said of you?"

"Certainly not."

"He said that you were the finest specimen of a soldier he'd ever seen, not even excepting me!" said Ben, with a high in his esteem, that is saying a great deal."

"Thank General Morgan for me when you see him again."

"I will; but now to settle this other matter. I want to make a start to-morrow morning if possible, and try to run this Buck Toole to earth."

"There is no need of hunting for him."

"Why?"

"Because I know exactly where he is."

"Where?"

"About two hundred yards to the south of Squire Thorn's place."

"Again that other meaning to your words," said Ben, a puzzled expression on his face.

"Possibly."

"What do you have reason to believe he is there now?"

"I have."

"Come, Kit, why this provokingly mysterious way of answering."

"There is nothing mysterious about my answer. Do you think so, Sam?"

"Not a bit," with a chuckle.

"What is Buck doing there?" Ben next asked, determined to get at the bottom of the matter.

"Nothing."

"Is he there hatching up some new devilry?"

"He's beyond that."

"Ah!" as Ben's light began to break in on Ben's mind. "I begin to understand. There is a large black-walnut tree about the distance mentioned south of Squire Thorn's."

"There is," said Kit.

"Again Sam, chuckled.

"There's a rope hitched fast to one of the limbs of that tree," he said.

"And the other end—"

"Is hitched around that same rascal's neck," said Sam; "and I fixed the slip-knot."

"So now, Ben, you can see," said Kit, "that there is no need of getting up that little party for the insults that Belle has suffered at his hand have been avenged and he is beyond power to do her further harm."

Then Kit explained how it all happened, as an angry man told to the reader, and—hence unnecessary to repeat here.

For the space of a week the family were united.

Then Ben announced that he must leave out the following day.

"And that," said he, "brings us to a point we must discuss, what are the future actions of all of us? You, Kit, will return, when recovered, to the army?"

"Yes."

"And I, of course, must go back. Now, father, do you think it best to remain here?"

"I do," was the reply.

"When the Confederates advanced to the north of us we might better have been away from here; but then we couldn't get away. Now that the Union lines are to the south of us there is no need for going."

"The Union army may be driven back," said Ben.

"I am sorry for you, Ben," said Kit, just here, "but the Confederate army, once driven from the ground, Shiloh is only the commencement of a series of blows which are going to crush you."

"Of whom two," said Ben.

"In all candor, I believe it possible," was the reply, "although, from the other point of view, I hope otherwise. Then, father, you will remain here?"

"Yes."

"And you, Harry?"

"I'd like to stay myself," said Harry, blantly, and then cast at Belle a look that made her grow suddenly red.

"A good idea," said Ben, warmly. "Come, Belle, say the word and I'll be Harry happy. Let's have the wedding to-morrow night, and I'll defer my departure until after the ceremony. What do you say, Belle?"

"Why, that you're real mean!" exclaimed the little maiden.

"Is it yes or no?"

"Would it please you very much?"

"Yes. I should feel much easier in mind could I know that Harry were to remain here. With only one hand he's a match even now for two ordinary men."

Belle looked at Kit.

"I'm sure with Belle," he said.

"I don't think that arrangement would suit Harry," Belle now said, demurely.

"It's settled," said Harry, after springing to Belle's side, kissing her rosebud lips, and then placing his mouth in such a position to the girl's ear that Sam began to grow uneasy lest that pretty sea-shell appendage might be accidentally injured between Harry's strong, white teeth.

So the next night there was a wedding.

Mr. Langdon performed the ceremony, while Kit gave away the bride.

"When it was over," Sam choked down a sob, and muttered to himself:

"Well, it's 'pose he's best suited to her, but blame me, the more I see of her the more I feel as if I'd like to run the risk myself."

An hour after Belle Langdon became Mrs. Harry Briggs. Ben took his leave of them, to return to the front.

Two weeks later Kit was sufficiently recovered to return to his command, and with him of course went Sam.

CHAPTER XIX.

CONCLUSION.

The limits of our story prevent us following in detail the army life of Kit Langdon beyond the battle we have already described—Shiloh.

Hence we can only hastily sketch it—give the mere outlines.

He was back in his regiment in time to go into the series of skirmishes that commenced soon after.

General Buell tells us that General Beauregard, after the battle of Shiloh, fell back to Corinth, which place he at once began to strongly fortify.

On the whole, the Union army was re-arranged, and new troops added, and, having advanced slowly but steadily, the Federals soon were within a few miles of Corinth. Every preparation was made to stubbornly defend this place, for it was the key to all the territory south of it. Should Corinth fall, it opened up the Mississippi River to the Federals from its source to its mouth.

So on the night of May the Confederates sallied forth to check the Union army, and, if possible, prevent a nearer approach, and were successful driving back the Federal general Pope.

But this was only temporary; and day after day the Union army drew closer to the doomed place, which the rebels could not save, struggle as they might.

On the day after day they fought, and gave battle to the foe who was pressing them so hard.

In one of these skirmishes it fell to Kit's lot to rescue a brigade commander who had been snatched up by a party of rebel cavalry.

It was a brave thing—and as cool-headed as it was brave—and for it congress voted him a medal in commemoration of the exploit, and shortly afterward, having had attention called to the Fort Donelson affair, granted him another for his conduct prior to and at the time of the engagement.

His rescue of his brigade commander made him host of powerful friends, and he was urged again and again to consent to having a commission secured for him.

But he adhered firmly to the determination to remain only a private.

On May 21, General Halleck's batteries had advanced to within three miles of Corinth; and then the rebels themselves saw and understood that the place was doomed, that they could not hold it.

All preparations had been made by the Union army for a long siege, which was made unnecessary by Beauregard, who, like the Arab,

"Folded his tent,
And stole silently away."

He evacuated Corinth on the thirtieth of May, during the early hours of the morning while darkness still enshrouded the

earth; and when day dawned the Federals found that they had gained an important although bloodless victory.

It would please us to follow Kit Langdon through the succeeding months, but, as we have stated, it is impossible at least in this time and place.

Wherever there was fighting there Kit Langdon was.

Where Kit Langdon was, there also was Sam Black!

Perryville!

Murfreesboro! (Stone River.)

Lebanon!

Hoover's Gap!

Chattanooga!

Chickamauga!

The suggestion was contained in the motion of the forgoing battlefields or skirmishes will be a key to every man who went through those campaigns, and to those who did not, some other tale woven around them will tell a similar story, perhaps.

Now for a few final words.

Kit Langdon served through until the end of the war, leaving as he had entered—only a man.

But that did not mean that he had not gained credit and glory, or that he had acted a less noble part than many another man who was proud of his shoulder-straps.

Sam Black fought side by side with him, received his discharge on the same day, and bore him company back to the valley in the mountains.

Here the old folks had remained ever since, and with them Harry and Belle still were.

This was the first time Kit had seen them since parting the last time, although he kept up a regular communication with them.

By means of these letters, Kit knew that a little baby boy had come to Belle, but it was not until they got back that it transpired that Belle had named him Samuel Black Briggs.

She had always felt a deep sympathy for the honest fellow, and named her firstborn after him.

Sam, the negress Di expressed it, "hab gone clear off de handle ober dat dere child."

He certainly was very much pleased over the child as its name, and he one day told himself in confidence that everything surely turned out for the best.

"For," quoth he, "here's a bright little boy who loves me as much as he knows how, and bears my name, and another man runs all the risk!"

And then he chuckled softly.

After Ben's departure on his sister's wedding night, very little was heard from him, and that only indirectly.

But, a few months after the fall of Richmond, he came home.

One day Sam and Morgan until the very last, had accompanied him on his last daring raid, in which the dashing commander of cavalry lost his life.

"Morgan was a magnificent fellow," Ben one day said to Kit, his eyes moist, as old recollections crowded on his mind. "By the way, Kit, I gave him that message of yours."

"Ah! and what did he say?"

"I know that man. I'll write him to come and dine with us some day, and I'll give him an escort here and back."

It is very seldom that the war is ever all over to the Langdon family. Not because there would be any jar, for, although divided in their convictions at the time, each knew the other was absolutely honest and sincere; but they avoid it rather because they feel that it settles the best so—and explanations are not necessary.

But Sam will talk.

He can't be choked off talking about the war.

And nothing pleases him so much as to corner little Sam—not so little now—and tell him tales of peril and adventure in the war, in all of which he acts a very modest part.

He has been always in his Uncle Kit, who really served his country truly and well, even though he was only a Private.

[THE END.]

The Major's Story.

The major had shown at his best, and we had seen to his humorous narrative with keen delight.

So the dinner had passed and the dessert was before us, the servants had been dismissed, and cigars were lighted.

Then one of those unaccountable silences that come to such assemblages fell upon us, and we puffed away at our cigars and said nothing, and now I stillness grew strangely weird and powerful.

Suddenly the major stopped smoking, and, looking at each of us in turn, said:

"You have often wondered why I am not married, and how I will tell you."

"It is a long story, but it may be of interest to you, and, as we are all that are left, I have thought that the secret should be shared between us."

"When the war came I had but just graduated from college, and, as you know, enlisted as a private."

"It was no easy matter for me to do this, but, I felt I'd tell you my duty."

"I was young, strong, and able to fight. I had means to make the life of a soldier as comfortable as it could be made, and, while my mind longed for literary and poetical scenes, I still felt that I owed my country a duty."

"It was but a short time after I enlisted when we were ordered south."

"The regiment, as you know, had hard work and plenty of it, but my pay was well rewarded as I could wish, for I was soon advanced to the command of my company."

"You must remember the time when we were south of the Rappahannock, and were quartered in that queer little village, when even, though we were foes, the people treated us so kindly."

"You must also remember the large house back of the village, the one that crowned the hill on whose side were so many orchards?"

"Well, I had been but a day in the village when I found out that it was the native place of Harry Wayne, my college chum, and also that the house on the hill was his home."

"For a few days I refrained from calling, thinking that my uniform might be distasteful to Harry's mother and sisters, for he had gone with his sister and was an officer in Lee's army. At last my desire to know something of my old friend grew too strong to be kept down by such scruples, and one afternoon, I walked to the house, and, passing up the slight, grassy hill of alarm, from the road to the door, went slowly up the steps leading to the pleasant and shady veranda, and just as I was about sounding the musketry door, I opened the knickerbocker was thrown open and a young and beautiful woman stood before me."

"The laugh that had been a minute before rippling from her lips ceased, and she started back with a slight gasp of alarm, but my doffed cap and peaceful attitude reassured her, and she stood waiting."

"Is Mrs. Wayne in?" I asked.

"My mother is at home; who shall I say desires to see her?"

"Charles Talbot, a classmate of her son, and at present with the regiment quartered in the village."

"What are you the Charley Talbot who was Harry's chum at college?"

"I am."

"Then come in, for we all seem to know you, and, though on opposite sides, are friends," and she held out her hand.

"I took it, and its warm clasp thrilled me strangely, as did the clear glance of the bright eyes that were so aptured to mine."

"I am Madeline Wayne. Harry's sister," she went on. "We have heard so much from Harry concerning you, and your kindness to him, that we have often longed to meet you."

Harry said he knew you would be in the Northern army; but for us, in your case, there is no war. Please be seated, and I will call mother."

"We had passed into a large, airy drawing-room while she had been speaking. Here she left me, and soon returned with a middle-aged lady, whose beauty was of that quiet, motherly kind, so rich in the power that makes one comfortable and at ease."

"I found that, despite my antagonistic uniform, I was held a friend; and glad was I to know that, for the first glance of mine, Harry's eyes had broken down the barriers that I had raised against love—barriers of which I had made many boasts to myself—and I knew that, come what would, my future life would be garnished with joy from her kindness, or have no joy at all."

"I was invited to remain to supper, and did so; and when my duty forced me to take my leave, I felt that the major's story was as much as my time and inclination would permit."

"You can easily surmise that both time and inclination made the interval between

